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COVER: Traveling faster than light among the stars is an SF dream that could come true (see story on page 26). Art by John Berkey. ABOVE: With The Next Generation *canceled, and the new TV series debuting in January, the* Star Trek *saga continues in September exclusively on* Deep Space 9 *(see story on page 18).*

SCIENCE FICTION AGE

FICTION

44 THE SWEET, SAD LOVE SONG OF FRED & WILMA
By Mike Resnick and Nicholas A. DiChario

Wilma was meant to be part of a manned mission to Mars. Instead, she took a byte out of Fred, and showed him that love means never having to change your software.

50 RED DREAMS
By Clark Perry

The Joint Space Council had to decide whether the Mars colony would survive. Only one woman could stop Earth from abandoning the red planet, if a depressed teen didn't throw it all away.

58 THE TRANSCENDENTALISTS
By David Ira Cleary

Beneath the veneer of our everyday world waits a universe that is beyond comprehension, for one glimpse of which Jaromir Stavan will risk all.

64 CREATIVE CRITICISM
By Elizabeth Moon

The pen is mightier than the sword, and science fiction is the nightiest of them all.

68 THE KEY TO BLUEBEARD'S HEART
By Resa Nelson

The strength of Bluebeard's love destroyed every woman he touched, until one woman found his secret. Sometimes, the key that ends life's terrors is where you least expect it.

74 THE OTHER SIDE OF THE HILL
By David Brin

Bharis, the mother world, was dying. And when his entire race sought to abandon the planet they had destroyed, only Mas Wathengria stood against them. It doesn't pay to fool with mother nature, not even an alien one.

DEPARTMENTS

6 LETTERS
Readers remember Apollo, and our gun control essay stirs debate.

8 EDITORIAL
Giving the gift of science fiction.

10 BOOKS *BY FRATZ, DI FILIPPO, SCHIMEL AND PARKS*
Heavy Weather ahead as a near future thriller mixes with *Memory and Dreams* on the red planet Mars.

18 TELEVISION *BY ED FLIXMAN*
This fall's SF television season promises to be full of cosmic excitement and surprises.

26 SCIENCE *BY LANDIS, BENFORD, CRAMER AND FORWARD*
Can faster than light travel move from the world of science fiction to science fact?

34 ESSAY *BY JOHN BRUNNER*
The award-winning author invites you to consider your pharmaceutical future.

78 GALLERY *BY HARLAN ELLISON AND MARK ZUG*
The pictures and story behind the greatest movie (n)ever made.

84 COMICS *BY CONNIE HIRSCH*
Illegal Alien will blast away your preconceived ideas about SF comics.

88 GAMES *BY CHUCK ROTHMAN*
Visit Larry Niven's creative universe in *Return to Ringworld.*

98 CONTRIBUTORS

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Strange New Worlds ON VIDEO

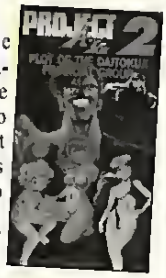


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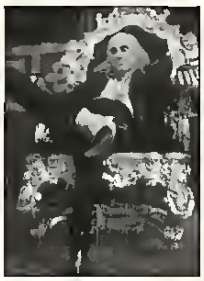
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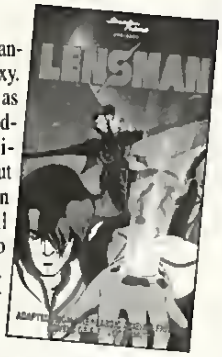


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LETTERS

Dear Editor:

I read with interest David Brin's essay concerning gun control. As someone who has studied both sides of the issue for years, I would like to comment. An effective gun control plan would be an excellent subject for an SF story. Especially as it's as possible as time travel, mind transference, etc.

Even if all the firearms in this country (or world) were confiscated, it wouldn't stop the carnage. Anyone with an ounce of intelligence and a bit of imagination can wreak havoc. Look what those bumblers did to the World Trade Center. They used common items to destroy a major building.

Guns are not the problem. Rather, it's a few (attention-grabbing) individuals. It's they that we need to control, not firearms.

David Kvergas

Dear Editors:

I used to be a proponent of handgun control, until I began reading the actual sociological studies purported to justify it. That's when I discovered that the details of the studies often contradicted the premise that handgun control reduced violent death. Real solutions are not that simple. I urge everyone to keep an open mind and get all the facts on both sides of the debate before making decisions about this important issue.

A. J. McPhate, Jr.

Gentlepersons:

David Brin's essay on gun control kind of twisted my mind. Here is a publication presenting five out of six stories in this issue dealing with advancements in technology, and in four of these this technology is at least in part weaponry.

Then we get to the essay that labors under the misapprehension that technology can be uninvented. It may be entirely possible to rid society of most criminals, efforts in this direction being very weak if even existent at this time, but it is patently impossible to disarm them.

Benjamin A. Greaves

Dear Editor:

Gun control? Gun control, I say? How about a little crime control? People like Brin are missing the whole point. We don't have a gun problem in this country that is "killing children and tearing cities apart." We have a *crime* problem. Criminals know they won't be punished, or only slightly so, and are more willing to kill, rape and steal than ever before. We need to severely punish these criminals.

Consider this statistic: The average prison time served by murderers is only two years. Average time served by rapists is a mere six months. If government can't punish criminals, then maybe it should move aside so law-abiding, gun-owning citizens who are tired of being raped and murdered can. Buy a gun.

James I. Kelly

Dear *Science Fiction Age*,

Perhaps it's time to stop relying on government to get us into space. Would it be *completely* infeasible to create some sort of private consortium of individual investors to undertake this task?

Thank you for reporting on the current state of our space exploration as well as presenting tales of where we may one day be.

Tom Wolfmaier

Dear Scott:

I can still remember the electric thrill felt when the magic words came, "The *Eagle* has landed." When the first human foot touched the moon, *I was there*! (Vicariously, but there, nonetheless.)

Daniel Hatch's article reminded me that although most who were involved in that undertaking almost 25 years ago were explorers in the historical human sense, it was all simply a political statement. Unfortunately, American politics today possesses no extra-generational vision.

William R. Appel

Dear Mr. Edelman:

I was especially thrilled to see your editorial and Daniel Hatch's article on the *Apollo* landings in your July issue. For me, the most important one was *Apollo XVII*. Why? Well, it was completed three months after I was born. I never got the chance to witness such a profound experience in my life. If one were to ask someone my age what the most memorable event was in our lifetime in the space program they would undoubtedly say the *Challenger* explosion. NASA's mission at the start of the space program was to be a leader in space exploration, and now the memory that is left behind to my generation is not one of triumph but of disaster.

There does not seem to be any hope that I will live to see humans set foot on the Moon. I should be thankful at least for the opportunity to be able to see the space station. As for the Moon, though, I will only have Walter Cronkite on video, and actual space travel remains science fiction. It's sad to think that seeing a man walk on the moon may only be something reserved for my parents and children.

Nicole Mortillaro

Readers—please let us know how we're doing at: Letters to the Editor, Science Fiction Age, *P. O. Box 369, Damascus, MD 20872.*

SCIENCE FICTION AGE

VOLUME 3 NUMBER 1

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Since 1990, world-renowned artist Al Hirschfeld has been commissioned to draw three different science fiction related works: "The Seven Incarnations of *Doctor Who*," "Classic *Trek*," and "*The Next Generotion*."

From the original drawing, a small number of limited edition lithographs were created and numbered by hand. These were each hand signed by Hirschfeld himself. Most of the lithographs were snatched up in record time by fans and collectors.

However, a small number of these unique lithographs are available now by special arrangement with Hirschfeld's exclusive representative, the Margo Feiden Galleries, Ltd. New York.

Hirschfeld's drawings have thrilled millions since 1927. He is the first artist in history to have his name on a U.S. Postage Stamp Booklet. The Post Office recently commissioned Hirschfeld for eight new designs paying tribute to silent film stars Rudolph Valentino, Lon Chaney, Clara Bow, Buster Keaton, Theda Bara, Harold Lloyd, Charlie Chaplin and The Keystone Cops.

In 1994, the prolific artist celebrated his 91st birthday, and he is still going strong.

The word "NINA," the name of his daughter, is woven into nearly every drawing he does. He playfully hid the name in a drawing the day she was born in 1945, and "finding the Ninas" soon became a passion for his fans. The Seven Incarnations of *Doctor Who* and *Classic Trek* each contain 3 hidden NINA's. *The Next Generation* contains. . . well, you figure it out!

Hirschfeld acknowledges that his lithographs have gone up in value tremendously in recent years. "I did a Marx Brothers that originally was published for $90, and now it goes for something like $4,000. That's a pretty good appreciation, I'd say."

Any of these lithographs would be a valuable addition for a collector, particularly true fans of *Star Trek* and *Doctor Who*.

Each lithograph is likely to become even more valuable as the small number of remaining pieces are sold to private collectors. By investing now, you virtually assure yourself of future appreciation.

Prices range from about $750 for *Classic Trek* to $1,800 for *Next Gen*. For more information, a complete catalog of science fiction collectibles, or to order by phone, call 800-873-5537 between 8 AM and 6 PM Eastern time Monday through Friday.



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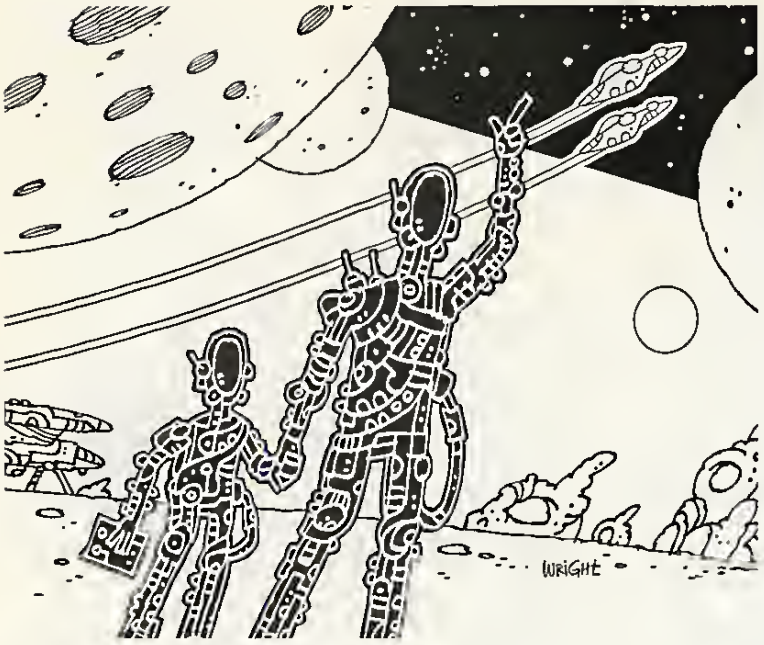


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By Scott Edelman

The power of Science Fiction changed my life and yours.



The love of the fantastic is a gift passed on from generation to generation. Art by Mike Wright.

I BELIEVE THAT SCIENCE FICTION FANS ARE MADE, NOT born. We are molded in the world, not in the womb, and it is here that we learn our love of the fantastic. There is nothing in the genes that makes a person open to things bizarre that are not of this Earth, no prenatal predisposition that makes galaxy-spanning space opera and time travel paradoxes so comforting.

We are the lucky few, as you can easily tell if you look around at the rest of the world's readers. All small children are intrigued by the fantastic. But most people seem to eventually put away the fairy tales of youth for the straight, narrow and easily comprehensible world of soap operas and situation comedies, and feel uncomfortable with the otherworldliness of science fiction. However, some of us are lucky enough to have had someone introduce us to and nurture in us a love for the unusual. Someone who plants the seeds of SF and twists our minds towards things alien.

If we are lucky, our imaginations survive to adulthood.

For some this nurturer may be a school teacher who is open to more than just the proscribed classics, who lets us do a term paper on an SF novel. For others it may be the friend who slips us a copy of an SF magazine across a lunchroom table, saying, "Hey, you should read this, this is neat."

For me, it was Uncle Jack.

Uncle Jack is my father's older brother, a retired electrician who spent 50 years as a member of the union, and who helped build many landmarks in his day, including the Meadowlands sports complex. And though he never attended a science fiction convention, tried his hand at writing a short story, or wrote a letter to an SF magazine, he has been an SF fan for as long as I can remember.

When I was a little boy, and the only SF I read was that found in comic books, Uncle Jack would visit our house each week. He would bring with him a treasure trove of SF, particularly precious to a child on a limited budget. All through my formative years, he would show up not only with novels by Andre Norton and Robert Heinlein, and short story collections by Isaac Asimov and Ray Bradbury, but also with copies of all the SF magazines then being published, most of which are now distant memories, having traveled the dusty road to cancellation which eventually swallows most SF magazines. Each week I would giggle as if it were Christmas morning and vanish to my room with my booty, there to immerse myself in the world of robots, alien ecologies, and things that otherwise could be found only in dreams. I can't even remember whether I bothered to say thank you.

As the twig is bent, it is said, so grows the tree, and who I am today is a direct result of Uncle Jack and his generous bounty. I didn't realize it at the time, but a few years back, when the mature eyes of adulthood opened and I started writing and publishing my short stories, I knew enough to realize that I would not be *me* without *him*.

Most of us never think to thank those who have made us until it is too late and we have missed our chance. I'm glad I had my opportunity to remember my debt and tell him so from time to time in the past. And I'd like to thank my Uncle Jack again now, publicly, for giving me the endless worlds of science fiction. It is also thanks to him that you are now reading these words, for without him the events would not have been set in motion that led to the creation of *Science Fiction Age*.

Why am I telling you this? Because if you were affected as I was, you should also thank the person who gave SF to you. Sit back for a moment and think. Who turned you on to SF? Who, when you were younger and your mind was ready for more than just the mundane, sowed the seeds of science fiction? You may not have a science fiction magazine in which to trumpet your appreciation, but you do have a voice. Give him a call, or write her a letter. Tell him or her how glad you are to be you.

And then, when you are done, think about how to pass on the favor.

Give a cousin an anthology of the best of SF. Get a friend a gift subscription to an SF magazine—perhaps even, ahem, *this* magazine. Let someone else see that there are other worlds than the one we know. Show someone that he or she doesn't have to live only in the here and now, but can choose to live in a million tomorrows.

Give someone the gift of SF.

And then someday, if you are lucky, someone may thank *you*. □

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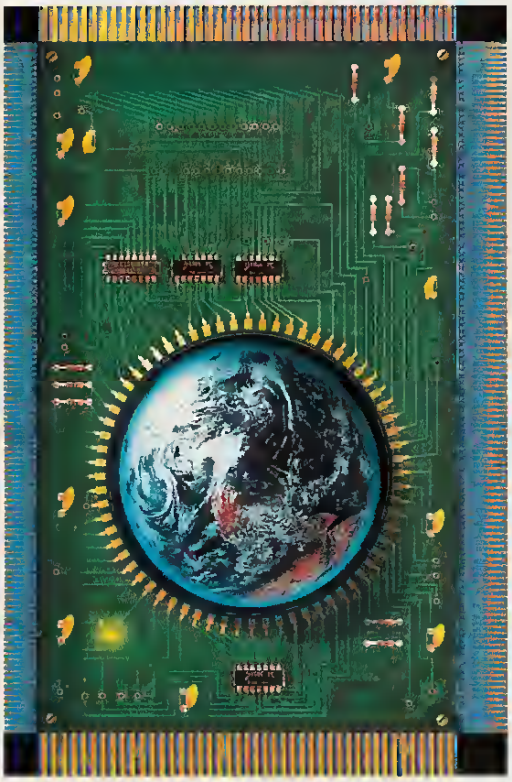
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By D. Douglas Fratz

Allen Steele touches down in future St. Louis for a clever mix of SF and mystery.



After a long stay off-planet, Allen Steele returns to Earth for a near-future thriller. Cover art by Mark Smollin.

ALLEN STEELE FIRST ESTABLISHED HIMSELF AS AN SF writer to watch in 1989 with his first novel, *Orbital Decay*, a highly promoted book set twenty years in the future and involving construction workers in Earth's orbit. That book was followed by three more, *Clarke County, Space*, *Lunar Descent*, and *Labyrinth of Night*, each involving space exploration in the same early-to-mid-twenty-first century future, featuring protagonists with attitudes decidedly more blue-collar than the typical Hard science fiction novel.

With *The Jericho Iteration*, (Ace, hardcover, 288 pages, $19.98) Steele comes back to Earth for the first time, with a fast-moving novel set in an early-twenty-first century St. Louis that has been devastated by an earthquake and is being made even more of a disaster area by the strong-arm tactics of the federal agency that has been sent in to restore order.

Steele's earlier books elicited a disparate response from experts in the SF field. Many lauded Steele's departure from the standard SF protagonists to common-men good-old-boys while still retaining the traditional Hard SF virtues of problem-driven narratives and a strong belief in man's role to expand into and explore the solar system. Some critics (and blurb writers) compared Steele to a young Heinlein or Clarke. Other critics, however, expressed extreme concerns regarding various weaknesses in those novels, most notably a chronic tendency toward self-indulgent insertion of references from the counter-culture of the early 1970s that lessened the believability of his characters and milieu. (For example, his space construction workers in 2019 listened only to Grateful Dead songs from 1970 and seemed inexplicably transplanted from a college dormitory of that same year.)

This type of self-indulgence—putting more of one's self into the story than is appropriate for the time and setting—is a somewhat common problem with some SF writers, especially at the very beginning or very end of their careers. (Heinlein himself is the most notable example of the latter, while Spider Robinson has suffered from this tendency throughout most of his career.) Some critics worried—myself included—that the early praise garnered by Steele might reinforce such self-indulgences and stunt the maturation of his considerable talent as a science fiction writer.

Our worries proved, I believe, to be unfounded. With each new novel, Allen Steele has improved his skills in the craft, and with each new novel his characters have matured slowly away from their anachronistic affectations.

In *The Jericho Iteration*, Steele provides us with his best novel to date. The entire story takes place during a few days in the life of a somewhat down-but-not-quite-out reporter named Gerald Rosen, who works for a small "alternative" newspaper in St. Louis called *Big Muddy Inquirer*. The year is 2019, less than a year since a major earthquake devastated the area. The St. Louis area is under repressive martial law administered by the federal "Emergency Relief Agency" (ERA), and federal relief funds are apparently being distributed quite inequitably. There are homeless people in illegal tent cities, crime everywhere, and curfews.

Rosen's adventure starts when he meets with a mysterious woman who has contacted him by mistake while trying to contact another *Big Muddy* reporter, who happens to be Rosen's best friend. They attend a press conference by a local aerospace contractor that is celebrating the launch of their new antimissile defense satellite, where they see the woman with the scientific team from the company. But when Rosen's friend goes to meet with his secret informant in a local bar, he is killed with a powerful industrial laser fired from a moving car.

Not trusting the federal or even local authorities, Rosen sets out in good investigative reporter fashion to try to solve the murder himself. He steals his friend's portable computer disk from the police evidence bag and hides a copy before the ERA heavies figure it out and come busting down his door in the middle of the night to drag him off to ERA headquarters in Busch Stadium. They rough him up only slightly before feeding him a story about the lead scientist at the aerospace firm going crazy and starting to kill the other members of the team, including the woman Rosen's friend was meeting with when he was murdered. The representatives of the ERA

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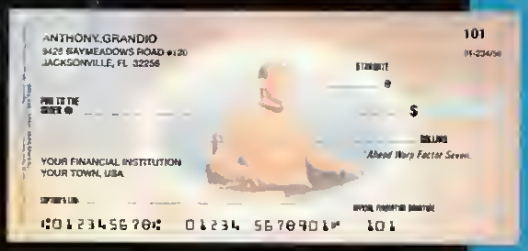
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and the firm are so obviously bad guys that Rosen, of course, believes nothing they say.

Things get more and more mysterious when Rosen continues to get inexplicable messages and calls on his pocket computer/telephone, including one from his small son who was killed the day of the quake in a train wreck. The action never stops as Rosen solves the mystery step by step, finding that it involved a computer program developed by the scientific team for the satellite program that has escaped and developed into a benign artificial intelligence, which now threatens the ERA's secret plot to take over the country. In a rousing finale, Rosen joins with the remaining scientists and assists their successful efforts to thwart the ERA's evil scheme.

It's an engaging thriller, but is not without its flaws. One gets tired sometimes of books in which a hundred low-probability things have to happen in the last fifty pages for the protagonist to gain his last-second victory. Rosen's blue-collar sensibilities are usually interesting but occasionally annoying. It is sometimes too obvious that the *Big Muddy* is actually a transplanted underground newspaper from (guess when?) 1970, complete with graphic artists doing paste-ups.

But mostly it works. *The Jericho Iteration* is a well-paced and cleverly plotted thriller with better-than-average characters. I now look forward to Steele's next novel, although I can't help but hope that he uses his burgeoning talents to return once again to the theme of mankind's destiny in space.

Heavy Weather, by Bruce Sterling, Bantam Books, hardcover, 312 pages, $21.95.

Everyone knows Mark Twain's famous quote about the weather versus human inertia. Much less well known is his line from *The American Claimant* (1892): "Weather is a literary specialty, and no untrained hand can turn out a good article on it." The theme of weather permeates Twain's book, culminating in protagonist Mulberry Sellers' "stupendous idea": manipulating sunspots "to reorganize the climates of the Earth."

I bring up Twain as a precedent for discussing Bruce Sterling's new novel, *Heavy Weather*, rather than more recent and also applicable genre SF stories like Ted Thomas' "The Weather Man" (1962), for a very good reason. While *Heavy Weather* still has all the startling, sharp-edged speculation (both political and techno) and vivid scenes of conflict that we've come to expect from him, it also boasts something different for Sterling. Like Twain, he has suddenly become a sly, wry, ultimately compassionate commentator on the foibles of common humanity.

In many ways, this fine writer seems to have retooled himself for the '90s. Once the quintessence of aloof, cosmopolitan, cyberpunk ideologue, concerned mainly with mass movements and the propagation of ideas throughout society and culture, Sterling now reveals himself as a character-driven writer of Texas tall tales. Compared to his dense, solemn and heavily complicated earlier novels, his new book is transparent, funny and straightforward. Reading it has the same effect as watching Italo Calvino abandon his ironic postmodernist stance in order to tell simple yet vitally affecting Italian fairy tales.

Heavy Weather takes place in the 2030s, a time when the Greenhouse Effect has spawned killer storms across America's Tornado Alley. Its action, excluding that contained in a one-year-after epilogue, is compressed within a few weeks. The novel's set of characters is similarly constrained: a dozen or so members of the Storm Troupe, a group of private weather-hackers; a few walk-on outsiders and relatives, most importantly the ultra-spooky dude Leo Mulcahey; and a brother and sister team, Jane and Alex Unger.

It is solely through the eyes of these two latter characters that Sterling presents his story, and the move is a smart one. These are the most enticingly believable characters Sterling has ever created, and much of their depth is achieved through sheer continued familiarity that would have been undercut by multiple points of view.

Alex is the younger of the siblings, and a sad case. Afflicted since birth with a variety of life-threatening illnesses barely kept at bay by high-tech meds, he has reached adulthood stunted physically and warped emotionally. Yet in his own way, Alex has emerged as a strong and wise, if somewhat careless and flighty, person. By book's end, when he finds himself confronting both the inhuman evil of the ultimate heavy weather and the all-too-human evil of Leo Mulcahey, Alex has matured to the point where he does the right thing out of a mix of self-interest and nobility.

His sister Jane, for many years a directionless type, has lately found her niche with the Storm Troupers. Falling in love with their charismatic leader, Jerry Mulcahey, she is now fully committed to their program of "bearing witness" to the destruction the mega-tornadoes bring, including the long-awaited and hypothetical F6 monster. (Although the Troupers call themselves "hackers," they don't actually manipulate storms, but merely observe and collect telemetry of various sorts, often at risk of life and limb.)

Rescuing Alex from a south-of-the-border

Books To Watch For

Isaac Asimov's Inferno, by Roger MacBride Allen (Ace). In his follow-up to *Caliban*, Allen once more dons the mantle of the Good Doctor. With the first book, he captured Asimov's spirit as no one else ever had, and this time he's sure to do it again.

Tomorrow Sucks, edited by Greg Cox and T. K. F. Weisskopf (Baen). Vampires are timeless, and as sure to prowl tomorrow as they were to walk gothic parapets Make yourself cozy with these scientific bloodsuckers from Roger Zelazny, Ray Bradbury, Spider Robinson and others.

Science Fiction Fandom, edited by Joe Sanders (Greenwood Press). It was once said that it is a sad and lonely thing to be a fan, but this volume proves how the tongue was surely firmly in cheek with a look back at the history of joys, infighting, and drama of SF fandom.

Star Trek Movie Memories, by William Shatner (Harper Collins). Trekkers who enjoyed Shatner's previous book last year which looked at his television journey won't want to miss this follow-up focusing on the movies that first brought *Star Trek* to the silver screen.

Traitors, by Kristine Kathryn Rusch (Penguin Roc). The family of the most famous Dancer in the kingdom is brutally murdered, and he must devote his life to tracking down their murderers in this science fantasy saga of revolution, betrayal, and double cross.

The Making of Star Trek: Deep Space Nine, by Judith Reeves-Stevens and Garfield Reeves-Stevens (Pocket). Everything you ever wanted to know about how the third in the seemingly unending *Star Trek* dynasty came to be. Go behind the scenes at the creation.

I Left My Sneaker in Dimension X, by Bruce Coville (Pocket Minstrel). Once, a generation of SF readers came into being thanks to Heinlein's juveniles. Now, another seems to have taken on that mantle. The new master of young adult SF returns to do it again.

Beggars and Choosers, by Nancy Kress (Tor). Return with us now to the complex world of *Beggars in Spain*, as Kress continues to explore a future where the strain of humans who have moved beyond the need for sleep must make peace—or war—with the rest of us.

Deals With the Devil, edited by Mike Resnick, Martin H. Greenberg, and Loren D. Estleman (DAW). Do these authors have a deal for you! All new stories in one of SF's oldest sub-genres, with tales from Pat Cadigan, Jack Dann, David Gerrold, George Alec Effinger and others.

The Covert Culture Sourcebook 2.0, by Richard Kadrey (St. Martin's). William Gibson gave birth to cyberpunk, and the world has never been the same. Kadrey returns for an all-new examination of how that SF subgenre has continued to change the way we live.



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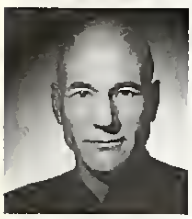


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illegal quack clinic in the book's exciting opener, Jane brings her brother back to the Troupe, where he is gradually accepted and swept up by the hunt for the ultimate tornado, the startling appearance of which forms the book's climax.

Basically, that's all there is to the straightforward plot. But such a description cannot do justice to many aspects of Sterling's book. Like a plain wooden clothesrack that holds a whole wardrobe's worth of stunning garments, Sterling's spartan framework supports a myriad of splendors.

> The F4 literally drank up those big sweet pockets of hot wet air, just like a thug at a bar doing tequila slammers...

First off, there's the requisite extrapolation. *Heavy Weather* is chock-full of intriguing ideas, trends and gadgets. So believable are the speculations that, as with some of Heinlein's work, one becomes convinced that the world *must* and *will* develop into what Sterling has predicted. From the collapse of government currency and its replacement by "private money" to telefactored robot birds to the trickle-down of intelligent military flealike passenger vehicles to civilians, the reader is presented with a plethora of wonders that have the cumulative effect of rendering Sterling's future as tangible as your own present-day neighborhood. Recently, Samuel Delany made the distinction between futures that are built from the top-down and those constructed from the bottom-up. Sterling's is definitely of the latter variety, assembling its macroscopic believability from innumerable microscopic details, right down to "a paper refugee suit that had been spewed through somebody's full-color printer, with remarkable results."

Second, there's a minor element of mysticism present in *Heavy Weather* that is refreshing, adding a dimension not readily apparent in Sterling's earlier books. From the "Taos Hum," a barely audible noise not detectable by any instrument other than the human ear, to Fortean rains of raw meat, Sterling shows himself willing to acknowledge a plane of existence which, while important, is not susceptible to rational examination. When the car containing Alex and Jane is bodily lifted high into the air at one point, echoes of Oz are obvious.

Third, there's the formerly mentioned Twainlike humor. Always a master of colorful language, Sterling has pulled out all the stops here, unleashing a gleeful cascade of wild metaphors and similes ("the F4 literally drank up those big sweet pockets of hot wet air, just like a thug at a bar doing tequila slammers") and hyperbole. Consider this passage:

Once upon a time the Texas Rangers had basically been packs of frontier vigilantes violently enforcing the peace on pretty much anything that moved.... [and now they] *were pretty much what they'd been two hundred years ago. One Ranger tradition always rang true, though. Texas Rangers always carried an absolute shitload of weaponry. If a bad guy had a six-gun, then a Ranger had two six-guns, plus a rifle and a bowie knife. If bad guys had rifles, then Rangers had tommy guns, shotguns, and gas grenades. Now bad guys had crazy stuff like plastic explosive and smart land mines and electric rifles, so Rangers had toxic flechette pistols and truck-mounted machine guns and rocket-slug sniper rifles and heat-seeking aerial drones. Plus satellite backup and their own cellular bands.*

Lastly, forming one of the book's *raisons d'être*, is Sterling's exploration of the poetry of physics and weather. His cinema-clear descriptions of the various tornado phenomena frequently extend for pages of hypnotically readable descriptive prose, proving that he is no "untrained hand" in Twain's sense.

My one minor quibble with the book is the introduction of a creepy global conspiracy toward the end of the novel. While intriguing and even thematically congruent, it seems an unnecessary touch, a bit of gilding on the domestic story of Alex and Jane and the natural drama of the storms which Sterling has already succeeded in making us care about.

An intriguing bit of publishing synchronicity brings us another book on exactly the same topic, which pales beside Sterling's accomplishments. *Mother of Storms* ($22.95, hardcover, Tor Books, 432 pages) by John Barnes, while dazzling and detailed and convincingly prescient in its own way, fudges somewhat compared to *Heavy Weather*. *Storm's* characters are less full, and its sense of moral consequences and real limits on human abilities are sacrificed for thrilling melodrama. It's uncannily as if Barnes has become the old Sterling just at the point when the real Sterling has moved on.

Like the late Edward Abbey in *The Monkey-Wrench Gang* (1975), Bruce Sterling reveals himself in *Heavy Weather* as a prophet of the elements and the American landscape and its intractable, wild inhabitants.

Paul Di Filippo

***Memory and Dream**, by Charles de Lint, Tor Books, hardcover, 400 pages, $22.95.*

After churning out too many hastily written books in recent years, often packager-produced, de Lint returns with a novel of scope and ambition. *Memory and Dream* is a novel of Newford, an invented city which has been the setting of numerous stories by de Lint, many of which have been collected as *Dreams Underfoot*. Newford began in the

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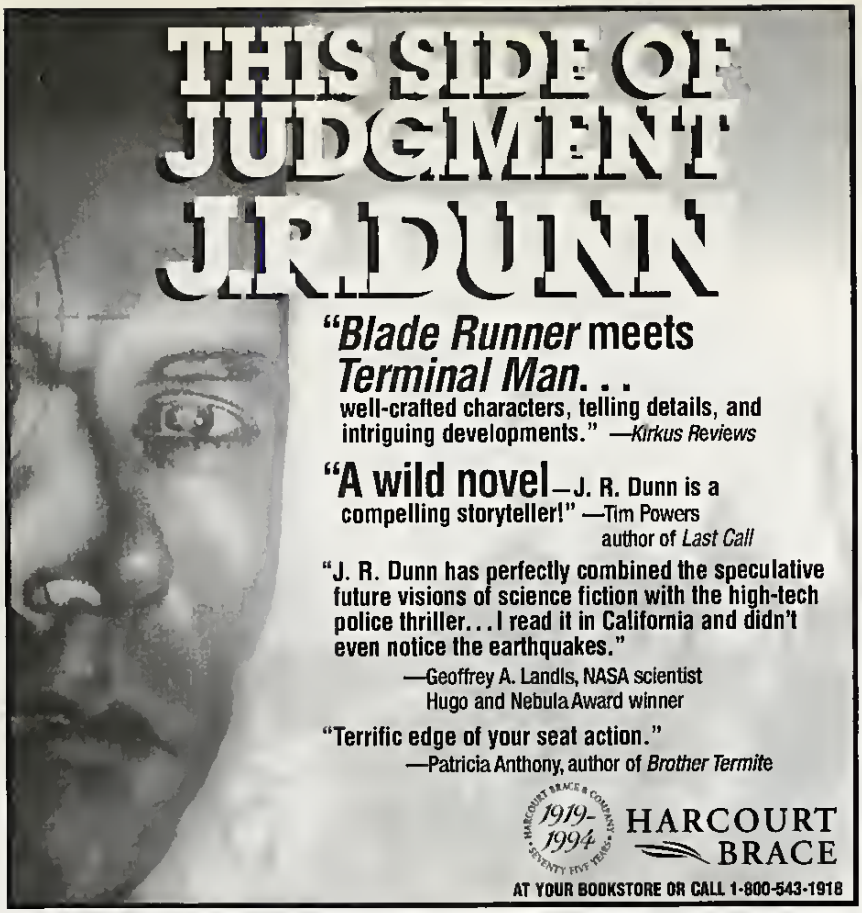
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short story, for, like all cities, it is composed of smaller sections, boroughs and streets, each with their own character and nature. The fabric of the story in *Memory and Dream* similarly mimics the city as the narration toggles between present and past, the way buildings in a city often alternate: the modern and the historic, the landmark and the new. A handful of the longer Newford stories were first published in book format (*Ghosts of Wind and Shadow* and *Our Lady of Darkness* by Axolotl; *Paperjack* by Cheap Street) but they were all "thin" in their concerns; *Memory and Dream* satisfies with the texture and complexity demanded of a novel.

Newford's first stories were organic, by which I mean they were written out of a purer artistry than the bulk of stories collected in *Dreams Underfoot*. All too often, de Lint has tried to combine an upcoming anthology's theme with his Newford milieu, resulting in trivial stories which fit neither Newford's character nor the intended market's subject. Many of those stories which are ostensibly organic, by my definition, were in fact written for anthologies; "In the House of My Enemy," for instance, original to the collection, was written for Terri Windling's forthcoming anthology, *The Armless Maiden*; "Bridges" for an unsold anthology project. In *Memory and Dream*, the protagonist's mentor, the famous painter Rushkin, details his personal dictum: To be paid for work, but not to work for pay. This is not an easy path to walk when one supports oneself strictly as an artist; however, it is a pity de Lint chose to violate this with the shorter Newford works.

Memory and Dream is organic and shows the care and craft that the bulk of the Newford stories and his recent novels lack. De Lint revisits themes he has worked before. The premise is, in fact, quite similar to his last, highly flawed novel, *The Wild Wood*: an artist is in seclusion because of the power of her gift to wake the realm of Faerie. The narrative focuses on various non-chronological times in Isabelle Copley's life: her flight from an unnamed tragedy; her apprenticeship to the celebrated and cruel Vincent Rushkin, who unlocks in her the secret powers of art; her intimacy with Faerie. She battles with her own past and guilt, and with the powerful dream-stealer (another of de Lint's recurring themes in his novels) with the aid of both the tiny remaining members of Faerie and with human friends. Thankfully, with all of de Lint's reliance on previous themes and settings, *Memory and Dream* does not dwell overmuch on Jilly Coppercorn, who has been diminished by her constant appearance in the insignificant Newford stories.

One need not have read the Newford collection, *Dreams Underfoot*, to enjoy *Memory and Dream*; I would, in fact, discourage it. In Newford, especially, de Lint takes the moral high ground, too often with the lack of subtlety of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*. His stories are vehicles to expound against

Continued on page 92

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By Dane Spotts



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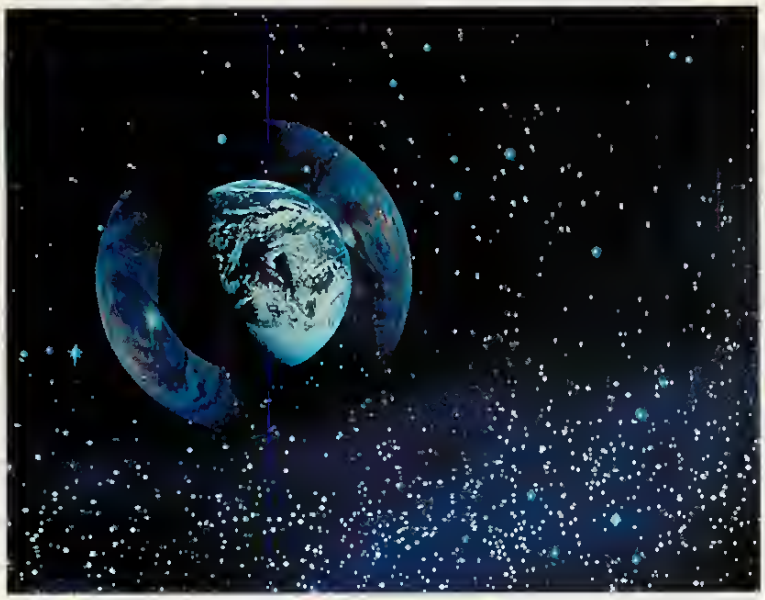
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By Ed Flixman

This fall's SF television season promises to be full of cosmic excitement.



Steven Spielberg's latest SF television series, Earth 2, *debuts on NBC in November.*

CENTURIES IN THE FUTURE, THE OVERFLOW POPULATION of a poisoned Earth is forced to live in gigantic space stations, but even these orbital colonies are barely able to sustain life in their sterile, artificial environment.

Desperate to find a solution for her son and others like him, scientist Devon Adair organizes an expedition to a planet, twenty-two light years distant from Earth, that she believes could offer a more hospitable future for humankind. But in the final stretch of the mission things go wrong, and the ship crash lands on the new world some 3,400 miles from the temperate zone where human life can be sustained.

The exodus of Devon Adair and her band of would-be colonists provides the theme of *Earth 2*, the latest entry in the collaboration between Steven Spielberg's Amblin' Entertainment and NBC television. The group's sojourn across the wild planet will bring them in contact with three different alien species (designed by Greg Cannom, winner of two special makeup Oscars, for *Bram Stoker's Dracula* and *Mrs. Doubtfire*).

Earth 2's cast is headed by Deborah Farentino as Devon Adair, the courageous mother who spearheads the expedition, making this the first spacefaring SF show to present a woman in command. Farentino claims a lifelong fascination with space exploration; "Just after the first moon landing," she says, "I heard that with $100,000, you could go to the moon as a civilian. I was so excited I started saving my money in a bank account. Eventually, I used it for my college education." After initially enrolling in various science courses, a bout with the acting bug eventually prompted Farentino to change her major from biology to theater arts, but she claims a continuing affair with science, saying, "It's a very creative field, and there's always something new to learn." Farentino has made a specialty of playing women in authority, with recurring roles in the series *Hooperman, Equal Justice* and *NYPD Blue* (to which she remains committed for one more episode). Yet she has the good humor to include her film debut, in the creature feature *Cellar Dwellers*, on her acting resumé.

The series' male lead is Clancy Brown as the team's "regular guy" mechanic, John Danziger. Brown, son of a former U.S. Representative from the state of Ohio, has made several genre film appearances since his debut in the prison film *Bad Boys*, including *The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai, Pet Sematary II* and, most notably, as the Kurgan in *Highlander*. He also appears in a starring role in the soon-to-be-released film *The Shawshank Redemption*, based on Stephen King's novel.

Also co-starring is Antonio Sabato, Jr., as the dashing rocket-jockey Alonzo Solace. Sabato's past record of mesmerizing female viewers on *General Hospital* and in a spicy Janet Jackson video won him a cover story in *TV Guide* and a listing in *People* as one of the "50 Most Beautiful People." Sabato's heartthrob status is, of course, a major component in NBC's ratings strategy. "I don't mind being described as a 'heartthrob,'" says Sabato. "It's sometimes part of the job—my main focus is to get the job done.

"Alonzo is a loner with a big heart, and a lot of courage for facing new challenges. Like me, he's a voyager, leaving his home as I left Italy for the United States."

A unique acting challenge is offered by the role of Dr. Julia Heller, who, thanks to twenty-second century genetics, is a little bit more than human. Jessica Steen, in real life a committed environmentalist, assays the role. "Julia has an instinctive thirst for knowledge," she says, "but, because of her genetic makeup, she gets a lot of flak...she's driven to prove herself, so she keeps her nose to the grindstone." Steen's past career has been primarily in Canadian film and television, though genre devotees may recall her role in the syndicated series *Captain Power and the Soldiers of the Future*.

Filling out the troupe are Adair's young son Ulysses (Joey Zimmerman), Danziger's pre-teen daughter True (J. Madison Wright), a cyborg named Yale (Sullivan Walker), and a treacherous government agent, Morgan Martin (John Gegenhuber) and his innocent wife Bess (Rebecca Gayheart). And there is a tenth member—a robot whose name, form and personality remain among the series' secrets.

The presence of this robot, and of the conniving agent, would seem to lend some credence to intial rumors about the Spielberg series, which arose in early summer, when an Amblin' Entertainment leak suggested that *Earth 2* was to be a refurbished *Lost in Space*. But, while the protagonists of this series are similarly marooned on a distant planet, that seems to be the beginning and the end of the similarities between the

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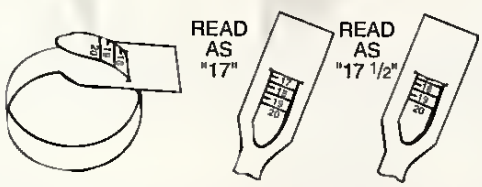
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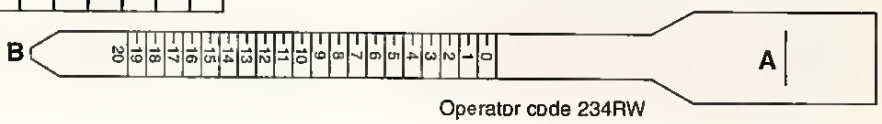
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After crash landing on a planet twenty-two light years from Earth, True (J.M. Wright), cyborg Yale (S. Walker) and Ulysses (J. Zimmerman) begin their trek across the planet.

Earth 2 crew and the space family Robinson. NBC sources say that the narrative will be propelled by internal conflicts among the colonists, by their reactions to the dangers of their new environment, and by "mystical occurences" the nature of which, for now, remain under wraps.

All three of the youthful creators of *Earth 2* have a firm background in "quality" television: Mark Levin's primary credit is as a writer and producer on *The Wonder Years*; Carol Flint's first television job was as the sole staff writer for the acclaimed series *China Beach*, and subsequently was supervising producer of *L.A. Law*; and Michael Duggan's writing and producing credits include work for *St. Elsewhere, Miami Vice*, and *Law & Order*. According to Amblin', it was their common desire to mount a sprawling SF epic for the home screen that brought the three together, and to Spielberg.

NBC is banking heavily on the trio's proven television savvy, the Spielberg brand name, and the allure of science fiction to make a powerful parlay. *Earth 2*'s perilous late-season debut, opposite perennial ratings monster *60 Minutes*, is no guarantee of a sure thing, nor is its positioning in the NBC schedule, leading into *SeaQuest DSV*.

Despite rumors of that series' cancellation, it is indeed back, though in considerably altered form. Loyal fans will recall the destruction of the *SeaQuest* deep-sea vehicle in last season's concluding episode. The second season takes place two years later, after Bridger has rebuilt the 1,000-foot vessel and staffed it with a workforce of scientists, explorers and naval personnel. Bristling with high-tech equipment, the *SeaQuest* remains battle-ready as it patrols the world below.

As cast and crew relocated to studios in Orlando for its second season, where cheaper locations will allow the crew to explore the planet's topside a bit more often, there were numerous defections from the cast, as certain of the actors chose to continue their careers in L.A. Now gone from the series are Stephanie Beacham (Dr. Kristin Westphalen); Stacy Haiduk (Lieutenant Commander Katherine Hitchcock); Royce D. Applegate (Chief Manilow Crocker); and John D'Aquino (Lieutenant Benjamin Krieg). Rejoining Roy Scheider's Captain Nathan Bridger for the second go-round are Don Franklin as Commander Jonathan Ford, the ship's second-in-command; Jonathan Brandis as teenage techno-wizard Lucas Wolenczak; Ted Raimi as communications officer Lieutenant J.G. Tim O'Neill; Marco Sanchez as Sensor Chief Miguel Ortiz, who is responsible for the craft's high-tech exploration gear; and Ensign Darwin, the ship's lovable talking dolphin.

Just getting their sea-legs are new crewmembers Edward Kerr as Lieutenant James Brody, a cocky special weapons and tactics expert; Rosalind Allen as Dr. Wendy Smith, a biophysicist and psychologist gifted with extrasensory perception; Michael DeLuise as Tony Piccolo, a misfit who was physically altered as a result of a scientific experiment; Peter DeLuise as Dagwood, the ship's janitor, who comes from a genetically engineered race known as "Daggers"; and

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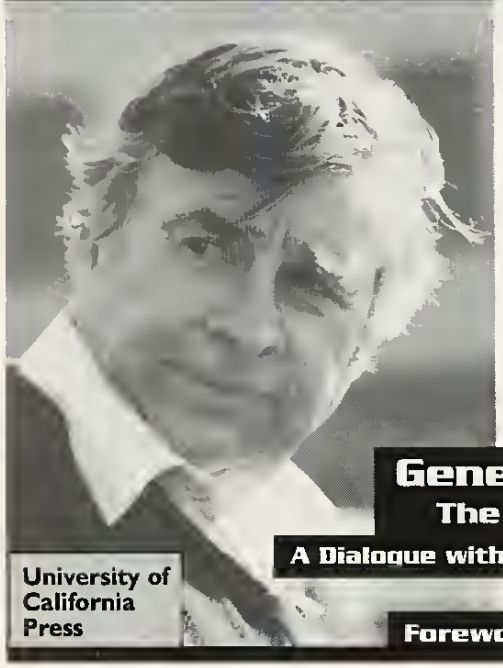
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Kathy Evison as Ensign Henderson, a naive young navy recruit.

Scheduled to broadcast back-to-back every Sunday from 7 to 9 p.m. Eastern time starting in November, *Earth 2* and *SeaQuest DSV* will comprise a genre block that is the boldest test to date of the viability of science fiction programming on a major network.

On Fridays, Fox television already has its own genre block, though the superheroics of *Mantis* (8 p.m. Eastern time), are more the stuff of comic book fantasy than SF. At the other end of the spectrum, *The X Files* (9 p.m. Eastern time) takes a low-key, cerebral approach to science fiction. That strategy, along with the engaging performances and cool chemistry of leads Gillian Anderson (as FBI agent Dana Sculley) and David Duchovny (as agent Fox Mulder), has won the show critical acclaim, and a steadily building viewership—small by standards of the big three major networks, but sufficiently large and demographically "right" that Fox is reportedly developing a second, spin-off series.

Last season's closing episode, "The Erlenmeyer Flask," brought an end to the X-Files project, and the season's opener will find the team split up, with Mulder in the field, assigned to "conventional" cases (yet still managing to get into trouble with uncanny forces), while Sculley is tied to a desk job (yet still the only agent who will tolerate Mulder's bizarre theories). Executive producer Chris Carter, interviewed in *USA Today*, indicated that the separation will last for eight episodes, during which time more will be revealed about the X File team's foes and allies.

While the separation is in large part necessitated by Gillian Anderson's pregnancy, Carter sees this eight-week period as an opportunity to play with a more serialized, less episodic format, involving more of the personal lives of both protagonists—though he promises not to go overboard. "I've never wanted the lives of these characters to be bigger than their investigations, than their work," Carter says. As far as the sexual tension between the two goes, everyone involved in the series seems to agree that a full-blown romance is out of the question, for now and ever.

Early episodes this season will feature the discovery of a genetic mutant, washed up on the shores of New Jersey; a "super-soldier" created as part of a government experiment; and, possibly, an episode about a "group mind" created over a computer network.

The last is a notion Carter has played with since his discovery of online computer services; this year, *The X Files* producers, writers, and possibly cast members, will be making their presence known on the Delphi service, directly communicating with connected fans of the show. "I'm not sure yet how it will affect me or *The X Files*, but I find it fascinating," Carter says. "Maybe we're on the cutting edge of a closer rela-

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tionship with an audience, which is a really good thing in this multichannel era."

When that happens, *The X Files* will become the second SF show to exploit the vast potential of the online community. Joseph Michael Straczynski, the executive producer and creator of *Babylon-5*, has been "thinking out loud" about his creation on the online services he uses for years—and, in fact, had built a fan audience for the show well before the first pilot aired. Throughout this summer, connected fans have been kept up to date with developments for the second season of *B-5* through areas maintained for the show on GEnie and Delphi, as well as on the globe-spanning Internet computer network.

A primary subject of speculation among these fans has been the identity of the new commander of the *B-5* space station. Shortly after Michael O'Hare made the decision to leave his first-season role as Jeffrey Sinclair, the leader of the beleaguered space outpost and interstellar meeting grounds, Straczynski was online, personally breaking this news to thousands of SF fans who access the variously networked *B-5* news areas. And when it was decided that Bruce Boxleitner—the star of *Tron* and of television's *Scarecrow and Mrs. King*—would take the role, *B-5's* online fans knew it before the Warner Brothers press release was issued.

> Creature creators John Vulich and Everett Burrell are adding subtle improvements to *B-5's* current alien roster and devising several brand-new races for the coming year.

Straczynski wrote, "We—me and my associate Doug Netter, along with our casting director—looked around and put together a list of who was available. That came first. Many names were on that list, and we were open to each of them equally. James Earl Jones, Corben Bernsen, Anthony Andrews, Bruce Boxleitner and others.

"Bruce had always been on the top of the list, though, because we all loved his work, and Doug had worked with Bruce before on several other projects and considered their experience one of the best working experiences he'd ever had. So we met with Bruce, and everything about him struck me as perfect for the role. So we then recommended his name to Warner Bros./Prime Time Entertainment Network, and they said, in essence, 'Go for it.' And we did."

Though Straczynski remains mum on the turns his narrative will take in the coming season, he promises major improvements in the show's production values in the coming season: "We took a blood oath: each year, bigger and better...[we've] done a lot of work on the sets; refurbished, made better, put in windows that look out onto the garden, expanded...and built some new sets, including an officers' club, a bazaar, and other sets."

The show, which won an Emmy in its first year for the visual effects created by Ron Thornton, will put Thornton to work in creating "virtual sets," combining digital graphics, mattes, and live action film to create a grander, more open look for the show, while the Emmy-nominated creature creators John Vulich and Everett Burrell are adding subtle improvements to *B-5*'s current alien roster and devising several brand-new races for the coming year.

Meanwhile, the franchise that started the current sci-fi boom is itself in a state of renewal. *Star Trek: Voyager* has already been the subject of more ink than any television series in recent memory, though a brief synopsis will suffice for our purposes.

Debuting in January, 1995, the series' two-hour pilot will concern a crew of Federation

Continued on page 42





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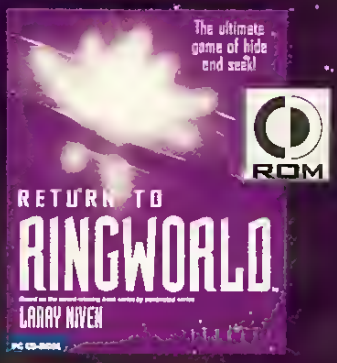
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By Landis, Benford, Cramer and Forward

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WITHOUT FASTER THAN LIGHT SPACE TRAVEL, there could be no science fiction. Intergalactic adventurers have been dashing across the universe since the day Hugo Gernsback first invented our genre, and SFnal characters are still doing so today, with no sign of—pardon the pun—slowing down. Faster than light travel, or FTL, is one of science fiction's most often used gadget conceits. But how likely is it that FTL will ever become a reality? Science fiction fans are not the only ones puzzling over this issue.

SF writer and NASA scientist Geoffrey A. Landis recently participated in a workshop on "Advanced Relativity and Quantum Mechanics Propulsion" at the NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory, which studied whether recent advances in physics have improved the possibility of FTL. By great luck, three of the other attendees at the JPL workshop were physicists/SF writers ideally suited for a discussion of FTL. Gregory Benford is a professor of physics at the University of California at Irvine and has also written over a dozen SF novels. John G. Cramer is a nuclear physicist as well as the author of several Hard SF novels. Robert L. Forward is the senior scientist at Hughes Research Laboratories. His novels made him one of the most popular Hard SF authors of the '80s. Landis met with our Science Forum participants in Pasadena, California the evening after the JPL workshop concluded.

SF AGE: Why is faster than light travel such a recurring theme in science fiction?

CRAMER: It makes the plot more efficient. If you have to spend years and years traveling light-years, then you have the makings of a dull book. SF needs faster than light travel to make interesting plots.

BENFORD: Right. SF is about very large horizons, and you need a quick way of getting around. Also, FTL's typical mumbo-jumbo lingo seems scientific without having to do any homework—or at least, that's often true.

FORWARD: And the minute you mention faster than light, you know you're reading science fiction.

BENFORD: Except that, lately, you could be reading the *Physical Review*, because in the last decade FTL has had a remarkable resurrection.

CRAMER: Or put it another way, the standards of *Physical Review* have slipped quite a bit. [laughter]

FORWARD: In fact, Matt Visser just said that the last *Physicol Review* has five papers on time travel.

BENFORD: Don't try to buy this at your newsstand, but take our word for it, it's true. The magazine is just littered with this kind of stuff.

SF AGE: Why do we believe that Einstein was right about there being a light barrier?

BENFORD: The authority of genius. A millennium from now, this century will have two images, two men by which it is known. The odd thing is that they both came from the same culture, lived in the same city, were archenemies, and never met each other. Einstein is one, and the other is Hitler. (They both lived in Berlin.) Everything else is going to wash away. Hitler was evil, Einstein was saintly, and his mechanics inspire awe.

CRAMER: In high-energy physics one tests this light-speed barrier all the time, and it's never been found to fail. So to first order, FTL is impossible. Basically, what we have to do is to look for second order effects that provide loopholes by means of which you might get around this basic problem, which is that if you try to boost a massive object to the speed of bght, you need all the energy in the universe to do it.

BENFORD: I became fascinated by this because of the theories which purported to give field solutions for faster than light particles, tachyons. After the reported discovery of tachyons in 1972, I began to mull over what would happen to the world, and the whole scientific enterprise, if tachyons proved to exist. I had at that time already written a paper with David Book and Bill Newcomb, called "The Tachyonic Antitelephone," which reduced to a shambles a previous discussion, trying to reinterpret backward in time transmissions as in fact forward in time transmission of an antiparticle. Still, it seemed to me that if tachyons could exist, then everything changes. FTL makes time travel possible! I wanted to explore that idea as a scientific paradigm and also talk about time as the great ironic, dark element in human consciousness. We're the only animal that knows we're going to die, and we're the only animal that's nostalgic. I wanted to explore that feeling of lost opportunity, and that's why we think about FTL and time travel. They are the same thing—the desire to get beyond the bounds of the apparently possible, a very deep yen for the modern imagination.

FORWARD: Probably the real reason for the Einstein speed law is that the minute you have any mechanism

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for going faster than the speed of light or even sending information faster than the speed of light, you can violate causality. I just finished a book, *Timemaster*, in which I used the latest theories about wormholes and attempted to explore the causality problems. That was the most difficult writing I've ever done, especially as you approach the Cauchy horizon, which is basically when you start being able to violate causality. I tried to give examples of how you might be able to control that, how you might make it sensible. It was very difficult to do, and I don't think I really did it as well as I ultimately could. What amazed me is that at the same time, the physicists were looking at this from a highly mathematical point of view, and they found that if you define your parameters right, and you define your boundary conditions right, you can actually show that you can build time machines and violate causality but not violate any other laws of physics as we know them. Theoretical physicists who five years ago were proving time machines couldn't exist are now writing papers proving that time machines don't violate any known laws of physics except causality, and then finding good reasons why nature will allow us to have these time machines because things will arrange themselves so that no paradoxes are caused. It is amazing to me to find these ideas published in the physics literature. That's one of the reasons I wrote *Timemaster*, to get that message out to people who couldn't read the *Physical Review*.

BENFORD: I quite agree. Time is—and therefore FTL is—one of the obvious problems in theoretical physics. Our level of confusion is rising, which suggests that we're coming to grips with the inadequacies of present physical theories. But problems to a scientist are not problems, in a sense: they are invitations; they're a challenge.

CRAMER: Causality is perhaps the most mysterious law of physics. We don't understand where it comes from. The literature on the problem of the arrow of time is very confusing. We know that there are a number of different reasons why time points in a particular direction: the universe is expanding, that defines a direction of time; we find retarded and not advanced solutions to the equations of electromagnetism, that defines an arrow of time; we find that in thermodynamics entropy is increasing and that defines an arrow of time; and in the decay of the Ko meson we find a difference between time running forward and time running backward, which defines another arrow of time. Nobody has a good idea of how these things are connected. And I've never seen a science fiction story that connects them together either (but it would be nice to write one sometime). The science fiction genre, however, has probably provided the most discussions (with the possible exception of the recent physics literature) of the problems implicit in time travel paradoxes. How can you resolve what happens if you do go

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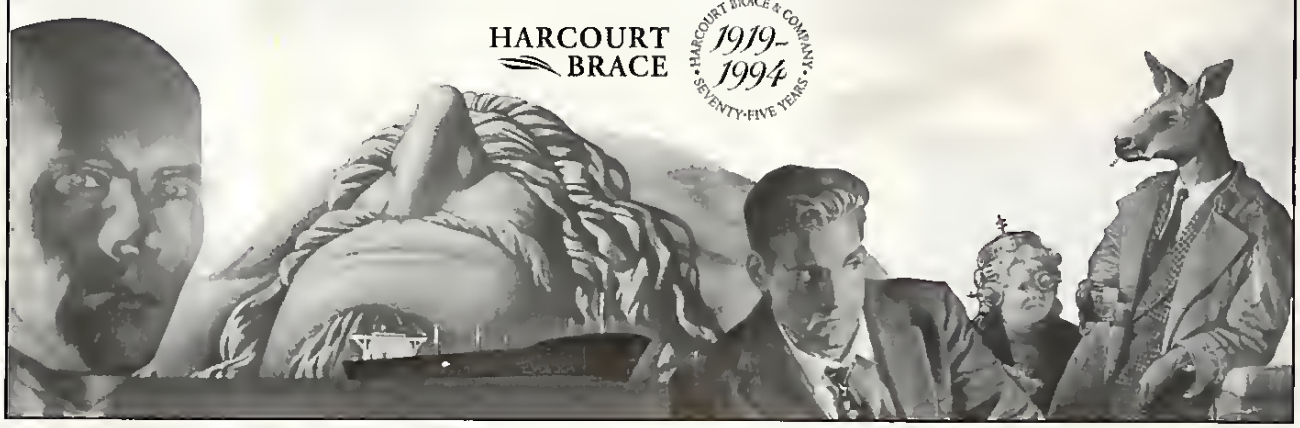
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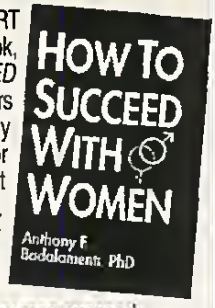
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back in time and shoot your grandmother, or cause something to happen that did not happen in the past? There are a number of solutions to this. One is that you simply branch off to another universe. The most innovative solution I've seen to this, perhaps, is embodied in some of Paul Preuss' works in which the universe is continually expanding and contracting, and what you really do when you travel back in time is to travel forward to the next branch of a recycling universe, where you start with a clean state and can cause anything you want to happen.

BENFORD: But they have higher entropy.

CRAMER: It depends on who you believe on the question of the entropy of recycling universes. And the third possibility is that the universe is really deterministic and you can't change anything; you're locked in to whatever happens. Wheeler and Feynman, who did an extended paper on things involving advanced waves, investigated this and published a paper in *Review of Modern Physics* that essentially said (although not exactly in these words), that if you take a ray-gun and try to shoot your grandmother, what you will actually do is to radiation damage her so that she will have offspring who have bad aim and don't shoot straight.

SF AGE: What are the possibilities for accomplishing faster than light travel?

CRAMER: The most obvious possibility is to use wormholes. We have been extensively discussing them in the last few days. The basic idea is that you find a topological shortcut taking you from point A to point B without having to cover the intervening distance in real space. As you go through the wormhole, you're always traveling at a relatively low velocity, a lot less than the velocity of light, but in terms of the distance traveled in real space, divided by the time required, you're traveling faster than the speed of light. If wormholes are a possibility, they represent a real opportunity for faster than light travel. Another thing we talked about is Einstein-Podolsky-Rosen nonlocality (EPR), which indicates that nature is somehow arranging correlations faster than the speed of light or even backward in time, across spacelike or even negative timelike distances. If quantum mechanics was slightly nonlinear, then one might be able to use EPR nonlocality for faster than light communication. The third FTL possibility is that recent experimental evidence suggests that the electron neutrino may actually be a tachyon, a particle that always travels faster than the speed of light. If it's true that the electron neutrino is a tachyon, you could use it for FTL communication. That, however, requires some nasty engineering details that haven't been worked out yet. The last point which I would like to make is that there has been some recent discussion in the physics literature of what has been called "quantum teleportation." It would allow you to destroy a quantum state at point A and to recreate it at point B. This process always goes slower

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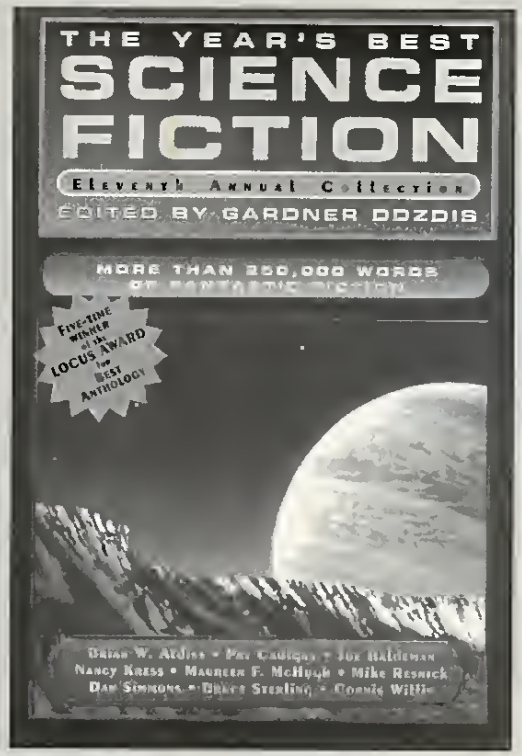


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than the speed of light, because there's no way of communicating the needed "code key" faster than light. On the other hand, if you had faster than light communication, and you had this kind of quantum teleportation available, you'd have faster than light travel as well.

SF AGE: Of course, teleportation would feel faster than light to you if you were the one being teleported. To you, it would seem to take no time at all.

CRAMER: Right.

BENFORD: The most probable way of traveling at FTL, at the moment, must be the rather low probability of discovering wormholes. They look theoretically obtainable, but they're extremely expensive. The cheapest way to get them is to ask God to have made them in the early universe and let them hang around until we find them. If they were made in the first fraction of a second, then we should go look for them, because it's much cheaper to find one than to make one. They have few signatures, unfortunately. They could be unusual events in a particle physics experiment, and there are ways to look for that. Wormholes can refract light when seen against distant stars, so if they're near the solar system you could see them. Personally, I'd prefer the laboratory solution, because I'd like to get my hands on one that I could squeeze through. Obviously, they're rare and may demand a great energy in order to liberate, alas.

FORWARD: Another thing: there are astrophysical objects called quasars that have jets coming from them. The jets have blobs on them, and the blobs seem to be moving faster than the speed of light. The scientific explanation is that they are only moving very close to the speed of light, but they're shooting right toward us, so they look like they're traveling five to eight times the speed of light. But then when you start looking at all the data, you find that there's too many of these jets coming straight at us. If they were randomly oriented, there wouldn't be as many jets as we do see.

CRAMER: Yes. These things are called super-luminal objects. One sees a ball of gas emerging from a quasar, and a year later it has moved about eight light years. So they seem to be moving at about eight times the velocity of light. The conventional explanation of this is that they're heading almost toward us. If you work out the relativistic effects, you can have that kind of apparent velocity because of the way time dilation and space contraction work. The problem is that these jets are seen on almost half of the quasars we know about. If you evaluate the probability that a given quasar would happen to be shooting a jet out in our direction, it seems to be quite a bit less likely than that.

SF AGE: We've talked about wormholes. What would it be like to travel through a wormhole? What would you see, and what would you feel, and what would the trip

Continued on page 95

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By John Brunner

In our pharmaceutical future, the cure may be worse than the disease.



The idea that drugs will do only what their creators want them to do is pure SF. Art by Doug Chezem.

MEDICINE, ACCORDING TO *THE ENCYCLOPEDIA of Science Fiction*, "is one of the few disciplines that demands a correlation of scientific data with almost everything described as 'human'. Medicine is therefore an enormously popular theme in SF." I'll drink to that. I imagine we all would.

However, as the article goes on to observe, there are not many writers capable of bringing to bear both writing skill and sound medical knowledge. Nowhere in this branch of the genre is the lack of the latter more conspicuous than in the treatment of future drugs.

How so? I hear you ask. I counter with a question of my own. Have you never noticed that there is something totally unconvincing about the vast majority of pharmaceutical products in SF?

They work. And what's more, they work as designed.

It is rare, save in comedy or—above all—in the hands of those writing against a background of specialist knowledge, for things to go amiss as the direct result of administering medication. Alan E. Nourse knew about that, but he was a doctor. Murray Leinster's "Med Service" stories and James White's "Sector General" series were essentially about human/alien contact, not medication per se, which has always been a rare choice. Rog Phillips picked a drug theme for probably his best story, "The Yellow Pill"; there are a great many examples of the misuse of drugs and/or mistakes in their application, notably in the work of Philip K. Dick; while Aldous Huxley's "soma" has been held to prefigure Prozac, a claim I beg leave to doubt on the grounds that we are still living as we have since the dawn of medicine in the age of the drug club, when what we need is a scalpel.

Or, to invoke an alternative simile, it makes me think of how car designers in the '30s and '40s, striving for an ever smoother ride, wound up softening the suspension to the point where the passengers sometimes became nauseated and the vehicles uncontrollable on sharp bends.

Granted, one can plead that progress continues, that in the course of time we may come to understand the functioning of the human body (and especially the brain) so well that we can make allowances for, or correct, the unintended bad effects of drugs based on compounds that our systems did not have the chance to adapt to in the course of evolution. However, I've given up hoping that that will come true in my own lifetime.

I don't base my pessimism solely on the classic cases that have been widely reported in the past: Thalidomide, for instance, which when prescribed for pregnant women led to their babies being born phocomelic; the benzodiazepine tranquilizers hailed with such excitement before they turned out to entail dependence and occasionally frank insanity; or the drug for arthritis that I remember reading about twenty or more years ago, which actually destroyed patients' joints and left them far worse off. (The reason I'm not citing that one is that I can't find out what it was called. I appealed to a medical journalist I know who commented, when reporting that his inquiries had drawn a blank, "It sounds like something the drug companies don't want people to be reminded of.")

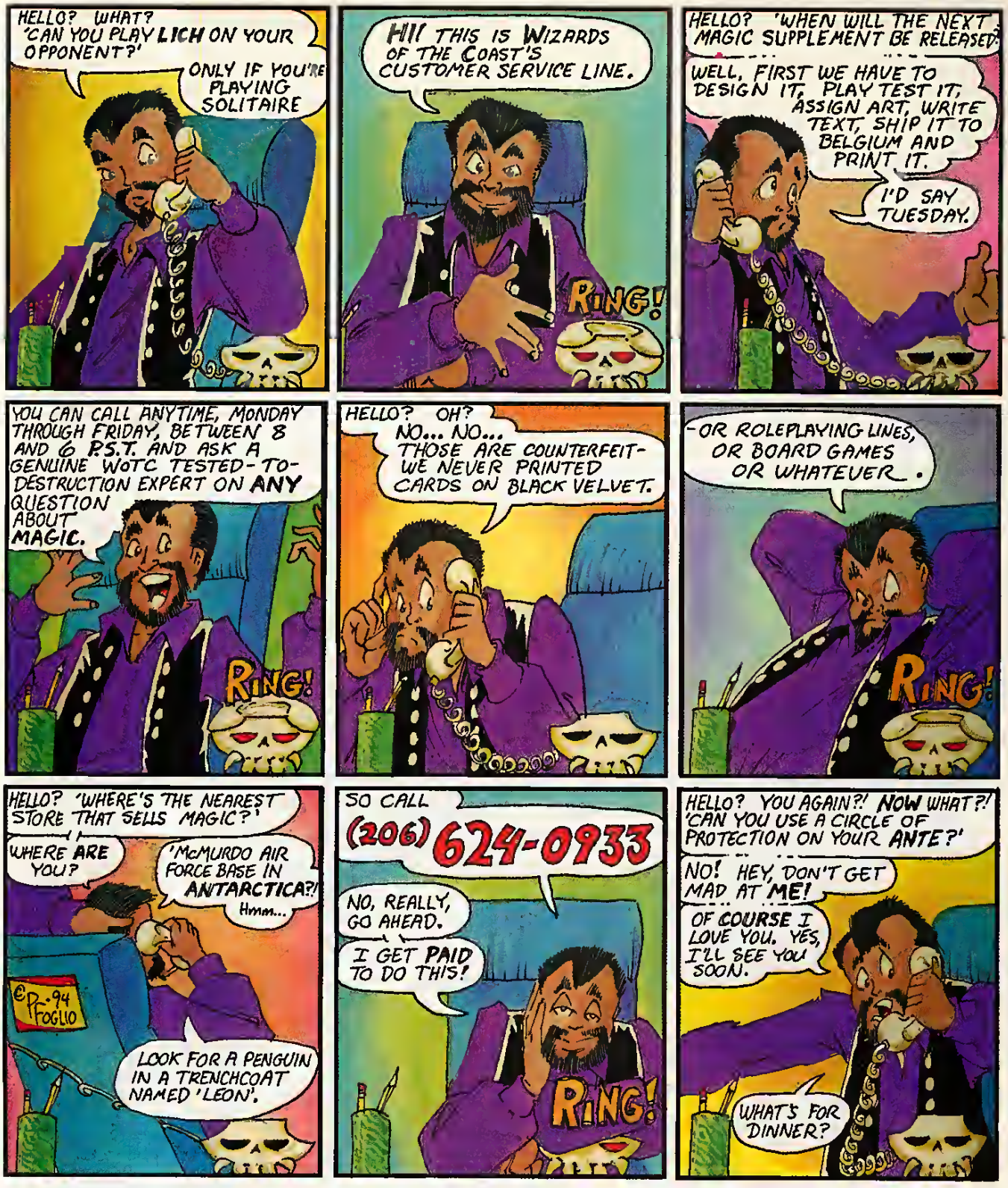
But in any case there's no need to rely on old examples. The process is still going on. I just mentioned Prozac. The first time I ran across reference to it was in a newspaper article about a young mother who had drowned her baby in the kitchen sink. Her partner, who had been doubtful about her taking the stuff since so many other drugs had failed to control her depression, told *New Scientist* he had learned on investigation that users in America had implicated it in a wide variety of problems, including cases of violence and other personality disorders. (What the poor woman suffered from was PMS and what she actually needed was progesterone injections, which she had previously been given but which had been withdrawn.)

But long before that time I had been personally concerned about the bad effects of prescription drugs. (I avoid the mealy-mouthed term "side effects" ever since my experience with antihistamines, which I will recount later on.)

A lot of my friends and readers know that my own slide into what now appears irreversible financial disaster began when I was stupid enough to take methyldopa (Aldomet) to control my blood pressure back in the '70s. It wiped out my imagination; I was unable to write for an entire year, on top of which it affected my memory and my personality, making me violent, and thus came close to ruining my marriage. Yet when I was allowed to stop taking it, I was writing again within weeks. I could never, of course, reclaim my lost year.

Shortly after, at a science fiction convention in

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France, I re-met a friend of a colleague, a pharmacist. She naturally inquired how I was. I told her I'd been on this drug. She asked at once, "Did it do this? That? The other?" With three questions she bracketed my year-long torment. It turned out that some four percent of patients exhibit the same kind of ill effects and the cure is to stop. Yet when I pleaded for relief, I was prescribed more drugs. The GP is still around, by the way. But he is noticeably less dogmatic than twenty years ago.

I am far from the only sufferer. While planning this article—some weeks back for reasons I'll come to in a minute—I remembered how I once telephoned an old friend whom I don't see very often since moving away from London. He turned out also to have developed high blood pressure. I'd just been given a new drug but hadn't tried it yet—luckily, as it turned out, for when I told him its name, my friend said, "Oh, I had that. It made me so ill after two days, I had to call the doctor."

A lot of this depressing state of affairs is of course due to the financial clout of the pharmaceutical companies. They seem to have become willfully unheeding of the misery their products are capable of inflicting, presumably since their explosion into a billion-dollar industry in which a single new drug can generate fortunes. (When one of them doesn't make money it may be forced to, by fraud and falsification of research results. Consider the Halcion scandal as a case in point.)

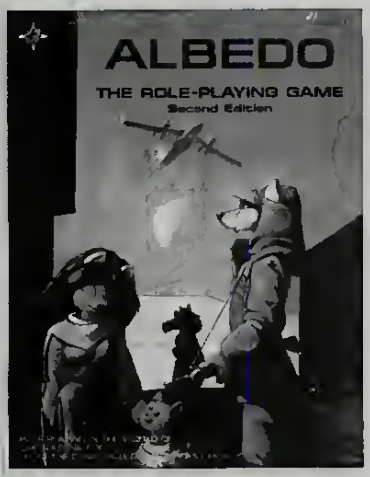
A contributory factor, however, is the self-regenerating anxiety afflicting, for instance, cancer victims. One scarcely needs to be reminded how desperate they can become under the never-ending pressure of this society in which, as some wag phrased it a few years ago, people are encouraged to believe that death is optional. I have no illusions on that score, yet I find myself in very much the same situation. My father died of a ruptured cerebral aneurysm; my mother also has chronic hypertension; and I am terrified of winding up paralyzed, so I can't help worrying even though I'm aware it may well make things worse. Exactly three months ago, following a long period of financial and domestic worries, I yielded again to my doctor's insistence. This time he gave me Inderal, a k a propranolol, a beta-blocker supposed to be so harmless that actors with stage fright take it before a show. I stuck it out longer with that one than any other drug since Aldomet, because in Peter Parish's invaluable book *Medicines, a Guide for Everybody*, you are warned not to discontinue treatment except under medical supervision. Sometimes giving up can bring on myocardial infarction.

Well, that's as may be. What using it definitely brings on is mental derangement, chronic diarrhea, flatulence, borborygmus, often nausea, disturbance of the sleep cycle (for weeks I kept falling asleep at eight in the evening and I frequently slept ten hours or more, sometimes with a break in the small hours), fits of sweating and shivering by turns, irrespective of the weather, a general sense of malaise, and a total inability to write or concentrate on reading even the most undemanding material. When Scott Edelman asked for an article, I proposed this one. He agreed at once, but though I started it on June 8th the drug prevented me from writing more than the first half-page. (I wrote all of the rest on July 3rd.)

Worst of all was the way, after just under twelve weeks, the drug started to make me fear for my sanity. I felt it was likely to condemn me to schizophrenia. I quit, and the hell with the risk—I'd rather have a heart attack than go out of my mind—and the effect was miraculous. I hadn't realized how much damage the vile stuff was causing. I stopped the day before yesterday. I had my best night's sleep in three months. Yesterday, when I went out with my dogs for their morning walk, I could feel the poison fading from my system with every step I took. It was like the sun coming out—like a light being turned on inside my head.

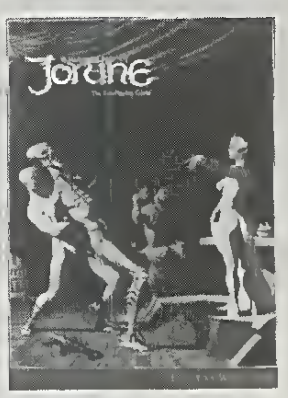
And here I am, back to writing, albeit not with my former fluency. Believe me, however, when I say that no more than forty-eight hours ago I was honestly afraid I might never manage it again.

In passing: I have never found anyone to confirm this, but it occurred to me a long while back, as a result of observing that all



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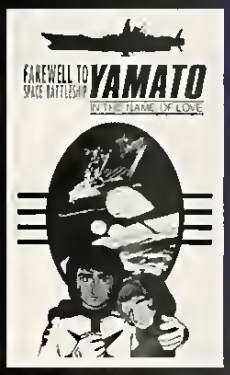
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CON-TROLL

the blood-pressure pills I had been given made it hard or impossible to write, that there may be an intimate connection between successful treatment of this condition and loss of creativity. In other words, anxiety may be linked to high blood pressure by way of the imagination, which not only generates fiction but compels one to fret over nonexistent problems.

Whether or not my suspicion is correct, I can't help resenting the fact that as many as four percent (that's one in twenty-five!) patients given Aldomet suffer like me, yet I was told to carry on with it for a year. I can't help resenting the fact that I was assured Moduretic, a buffered diuretic supposed to reduce my blood volume, had "no side effects," yet not only did it give me acute abdominal cramps—which is not very surprising, but difficult to bear—but, as I finally worked out after eight years of intermittent use, that was what was causing the attacks of agitated depression which sometimes made me so ill I couldn't work for two, even three days of the week. As usual, whenever I complained, I was offered still more drugs....

Reference to that episode reminds me of the time when, on a flight to California, I found my ears began to hurt while we were descending. Suspecting nothing more than compacted wax, I got my hostess to take me to a Los Angeles hospital. The doctor said I had otitis sera and prescribed antihistamines, which I had never had before. I duly paid for a packet of a dozen twelve-hour slow-release capsules and followed the instructions. The impact was like a bad cannabis trip. I felt ill and out of control; I felt giddy; I found myself unable to talk coherently at the Los Angeles Science Fiction Society meeting, because my mind kept wandering. Although I was supposed to take all the pills, after the third the next morning I couldn't face any more. I decided I would rather endure the pain.

When I complained about these side effects, I was blandly told, "Oh, those aren't side effects. Antihistamines always do that."

So I'm forced to add another factor to account for the mess we're in. Naturally heartened by the evidence of their successes (and I assure you I'm appreciative of the products that *do* work, such as the anti-inflammatory which last month fixed in days an ankle that had for a while been so painful that I literally couldn't put weight on it), both the doctors and the drug manufacturers have come to concentrate on phenomena they can demonstrate objectively, as on a sphygmomanometer, at the expense of how the patient feels subjectively.

What means are there, though, to measure how intensely a human being suffers from feeling that he or she is being driven to the brink of madness in order to bring down a reading on a machine? How do you weigh the effect on the patient's family? More than once recently, witnessing what the drug was doing to me, my wife LiYi grew positively frightened and tried to persuade me to stop

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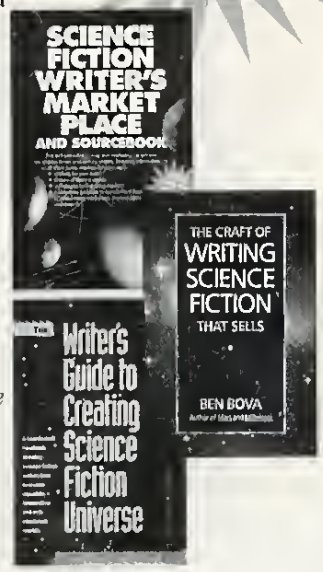
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it and try acupuncture instead.

Maybe she's right. At any rate, I unearthed today, from one of my numerous cuttings files, an article from *The Guardian* of I September 1992, reporting on the congress of the European Society of Cardiology and headlined "blood pressure drugs 'a failure.'" Quote: "Drugs to reduce blood pressure fail to benefit the vast majority of patients and have substantial costs financially and in side effects, a researcher said yesterday. Most patients would be better off taking a two-mile walk or even dummy pills... Side effects included gout, impotence, lethargy and circulation problems. 'There is hardly a clinical trial published where patients have not suffered, compared with those *on placebo* [emphasis added] or in a control group.'"

Well, I've read the best advice and try to comply. I take a walk every day, having dogs, and the car often stays in the garage for two weeks at a time. I used to smoke but gave up; I eat a low-fat diet; and so on. Regardless of everything else, though, thanks to my profession, which is both stressful and sedentary, and the tendency to obesity I inherited from my father—compared to whom I am practically a sylph—I remain at risk.

In passing: I can't help wondering about some of the reasoning behind such advice. I'll play devil's advocate for a moment. Smoking is clearly a bad habit, but tobacco is a mild tranquilizer, and I know of no studies to establish whether without its relaxing effect tense people would be even worse off, for instance succumbing to heart attacks years earlier than bronchitis or cancer. I was prompted to this idea when I saw in *New Scientist* a report suggesting that people drinking decaffeinated coffee had more circulatory disorders than those drinking the regular sort. I wrote to ask whether the investigators had made allowance for the possibility that the decaf group had changed over because they were aware of being at risk. They published my letter, but I had, as might be expected, no reply.

Wouldn't it be nice if someone could invent a cure for high blood pressure that didn't also make you chronically ill and disturb the balance of your mind? I used to think there was one, way back when I smoked cannabis, two or three tokes two or three times a week. My doctor pronounced himself pleased with my stable condition. Unfortunately I developed the paradoxical reaction (as I also did to Librium, by the way) and had four bad trips in a row, the last of which dragged on for five days. Now I can't bear even to enter a room where it's being smoked.

In this science fiction age of ours, here's an area where we writers got it spectacularly wrong. Who would ever have imagined that at the very end of the twentieth century we would still be complaining about remedies being worse that the disease?

Ole Doc Methuselah, where are you now that we need you? □

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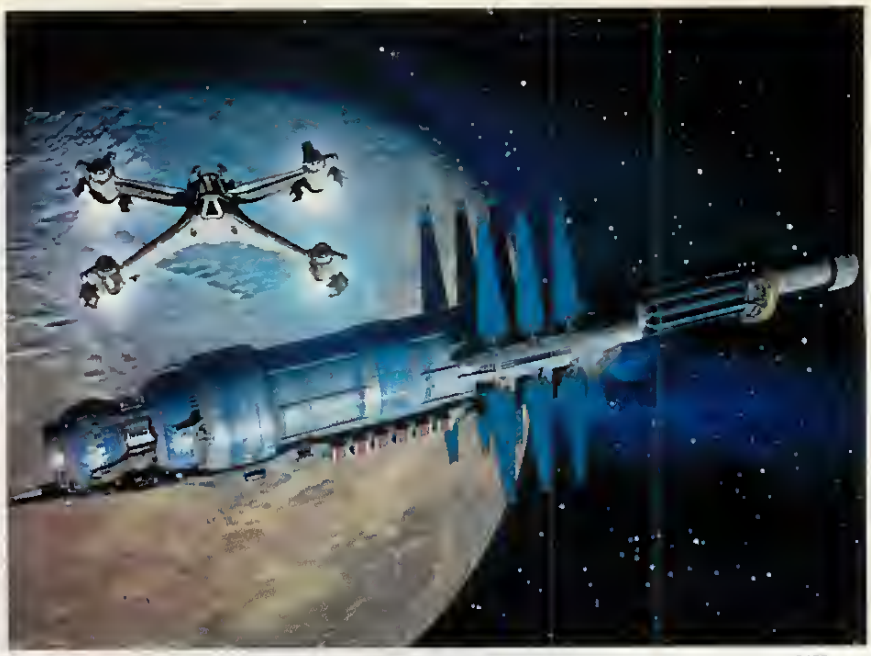
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Continued from page 24

officers on board the *USS Voyager*, in pursuit of a band of "maquis" (renegade Federation officers) on board another Federation vessel. The chase leads both vessels into "the Badlands," a region with a reputation similar to that of the present-day Bermuda Triangle. As the result of a unique astronomical phenomenon, both ships will be hurled to the far side of the galaxy, so distant that a lifetime at max warp would not be sufficient to reach home. By the end of the pilot, the crews of the two ships will have banded together, to set out in search of the appropriate twitch in space that will bring them all to safety.

In a *TV Guide* report, co-creator Rick Berman promised "completely new aliens in completely new parts of space." Two of the regular characters in the series will be native to this distant part of the galaxy, an exquisitely lovely female with a life span of seven years, and a wizened little old man. Another exotic character will be the holographic ship's doctor, who will only appear in scenes set in the ship's holodeck (this image is rumored to be a character who died in one of the earlier *Trek* series). A middle-aged male Vulcan character is planned, as well as a female half-human, half-Klingon, who is said to have some identity problems. Four series regulars will be human, including one Asian-American and one Native American character. Berman has acknowledged a possibility that a *New Generation* character may show up on the crew list. Of course, all details concerning the *Voyager* crew are subject to change in the course of series development, particularly by the casting process itself.



Beleaguered space station Babylon-5 *will soon have a new commander. Michael O'Hare opted out after the series' first season, and will be replaced by Bruce Boxleitner.*

Less well-publicized are the changes afoot for the third season of *Deep Space Nine*. The season premiere, entitled "The Search," introduces a new, compact, but powerfully weaponed ship, *The Defiant*, which will be

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permanently docked at *DS9*. Originally built as a Borg-buster, the ship will be delivered in the season's opener as a response to the thrashing the Jem Had'ar delivered to Federation forces in last season's closer, and for continuing explorations in the Gamma Quadrant on the far side of the wormhole.

Scuttlebutt among the fans is that *The Defiant* was one of several superlative ship designs worked up for the new *Voyager* series, but didn't quite make the cut; its presence at the *DS9* is acknowledged by Paramount as a move to bring some of the appeal of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* to the show, opening up the series to more action, more space travel, and even some planetside doings. One episode is being planned that will be reminiscent of the original *Star Trek*.

The Defiant is expected to carry a composite crew made up of Romulans, to provide the ship with cloaking technology; Klingons, to provide weapons; and the Federation, to provide life support systems. The common threat of the Dominion will be a uniting force—though we can expect Kira to have some trouble working side-by-side with those nasty Cardassians!

William Shatner's *TekWar* series has been picked up by USA Network. Eighteen one-hour episodes have been ordered and the series will begin airing in January.

The series is based on Shatner's popular books which are set in the year 2044, when the highly addictive drug "Tek" is the new rage.

Cardigan (Greg Evigan) is a cop who was sent to prison after an undercover bust of a group of drug dealers "Teklords" went awry. Cardigan's colleagues were killed in the bust, and Cardigan was framed as being responsible. Now out of prison, he is hired as a private investigator for Cosmos, a futuristic detective agency. Cardigan investigates the Teklords in his new position, while trying to find out who framed him in order to clear his name.

Cardigan solves the crimes in a new era where androids mingle with humans, the rich live in holographic mansions, and the perfection of virtual-reality technology allows people to enter computer-generated fantasy worlds.

Shatner will be serving as executive producer and creator of the new show, and is expected to guest star as Cosmos Detective Agency owner, Walt Bascom.

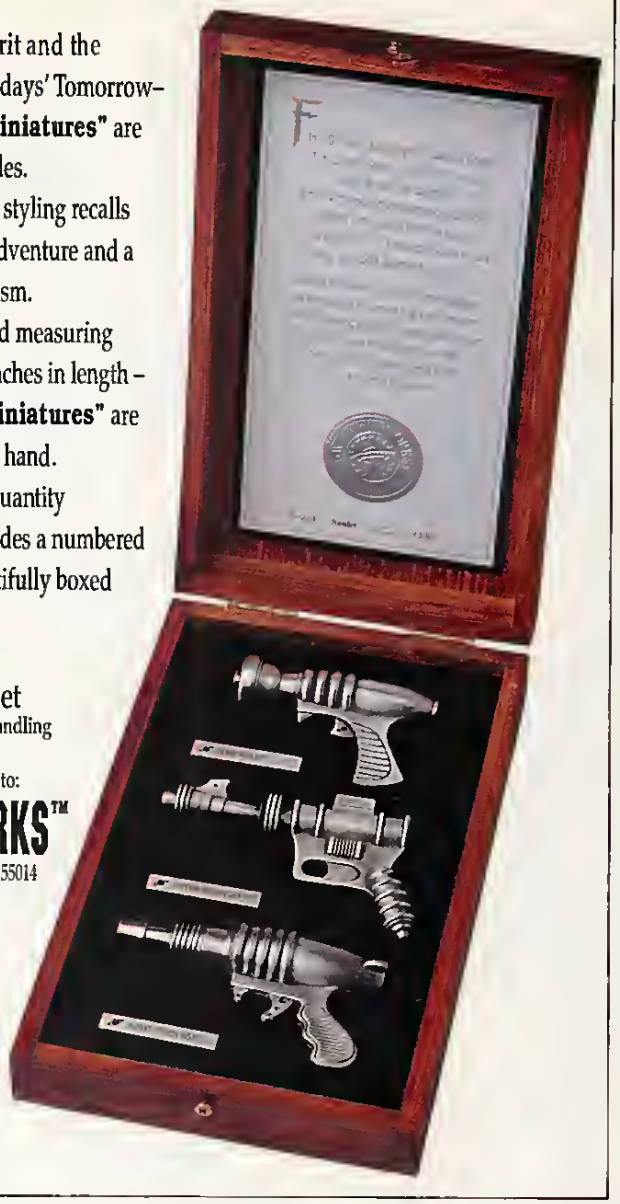
"I have this fantasy that *TekWar* will spawn a media-merchandising-cult empire like the one created by *Star Trek*," Shatner freely admits.

"I have this fantasy that the *TekWar* series will still be on TV fifty years in the future, when the series takes place." The new series is being produced by Atlantis Films Limited and is currently shooting in Toronto.

A series of four two-hour *TekWar* movies was produced by Universal Television and aired last winter. USA has also acquired these and will be airing these in advance of the new show. □

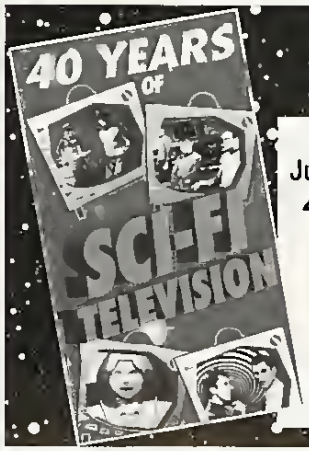
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Wilma was meant to be part of a manned mission to Mars. Instead, she showed Fred that love means never having to change your software.

THE SWEET, SAD LOVE SONG OF FRED & WILMA

BY MIKE RESNICK AND NICHOLAS A. DICHARIO

Illustration by Charles J. Demorat

THIS IS THE STORY OF FRED AND WILMA AND THEIR relationship—and no, it's not the bittersweet tale of two lovers you think it's going to be, either. After all, how could it be? Fred wasn't exactly your Arnold Schwarzenegger type, if you know what I mean. To tell you the truth, he would have needed a year of intensive workouts just to bulk up to your run-of-the-mill Martin Short type. Fred was five feet four inches tall, weighed less than the Flying Nun, wore thick glasses, sported a bald spot he refused to admit to, hardly ever smiled because of his buck teeth and poor gums, and favored a disquieting habit of biting his fingernails just when everyone else wanted to eat.

Oh, he was bright, all right; the older and mustier the book, the more avidly he sought it out. But he lacked even the simplest social graces. Like, for example, at the office: Very few hairy-chested he-men (or lawyers who believed themselves hairy-chested he-men), when gathered around the water cooler on a Monday morning and engaged in wistful reminiscences about the incomparable Sandy Koufax, really wanted to have a skinny little wimp tell them that Koufax's record in 1956 was an unexceptional two wins and four losses, with a 4.91 Earned Run Average. Especially a wimp who lived alone and dressed like Fred. (How did he dress, I hear you ask? Well, along with polyester jackets and pants that never quite matched and overly-starched shirts, he wore white socks every day of his life. Of course, Fred was color blind, so he figured he was safe with white. But that's the kind of guy Fred was: safe and white.)

Fred worked as a corporate attorney at a huge firm that had the good sense never to allow him to meet a client or appear in court, and within those limits he performed satisfactorily. He spent most of his lunch hours alone, daydreaming about being Alan Quatermain, or at least the Scarlet Pimpernel, and most of his evenings alone, sitting in his naugahyde La-Z-Boy chair, browsing through book after book, poem after poem. Sometimes he drank a little too much, and he never ate quite enough, and he could certainly have showered a little more often, but what the hell, nobody's perfect.

So there you have him, Frederick Bannister, tripping across the highways and byways of his life, stubbing a toe here, bruising an elbow there, spilling this, dropping that, and managing to make it to the halfway point without too many major accomplishments or disasters.

And what of Wilma?

Interesting name, Wilma. Not much in use these days. I don't know about you, but to me the name conjures up a picture of a pretty face with blue eyes; red hair; a pert, upturned nose; perky breasts; and a remarkable Stone-Age figure.

Well, that's *my* Wilma. *Fred's* Wilma possessed none of these attributes.

Well, you ask, did she at least have a sharp mind with a quick turn of wit?

That's really kind of difficult to say. She possessed massive storage capacity, and no fourth-level equation, no matter how complex, was beyond her—but whether she was bright or merely well-programmed is a moot point. Or at least it was in the beginning.

AH, YES, THE BEGINNING. WHERE TO BEGIN? THE FIRST beginning? The second? The third? Maybe I should begin with the convention?

No, no, wait—the phony contest!

Because Fred had billed more hours than anyone else for his law firm during the first quarter of the year, he'd won the right to attend what he was told would be the National Convention on Revisions to Overseas Tax Law, in sunny Florida. "Why not?" thought Fred. He had nothing better to do.

(Just between you and me, Fred should have suspected some clandestine plot. He'd never won anything in his life, and his billing hours for the first quarter of the year had been no more remarkable than any of his other billing quarters.)

But Fred put as little thought into this as he did most things, so he hopped a flight from New York to Baltimore, and a connecting flight from Baltimore to Orlando, and a connecting taxi from the airport down International Drive to the Clarion Hotel.

When Fred pushed through the revolving doors of the main entrance, he knew that he'd been duped. There were hundreds of

men and women dressed like Hanna Barbera's Barney and Betty and Fred and Wilma and Dino, and there were children dressed like Pebbles and Bam Bam, and if that wasn't enough to tip him off, there was the dead giveaway: a huge banner stretched across the lobby that read WELCOME TO BEDROCK!

Just for the hell of it, Fred approached the concierge and said, "This hotel wouldn't happen to be hosting the National Convention on Revisions to Overseas Tax Law, would it?" The concierge guffawed.

When Fred checked into his room, he received a large manila envelope—WELCOME TO THE NATIONAL FLINTSTONES CONVENTION—stuffed with a convention schedule that included such events as Flintstones role-playing games (for either advanced or beginning players); Flintstones singalongs; and a Flintstones film festival featuring an A to Z run of the original cartoon series, short films and documentaries about Hanna Barbera, *The Making of The Flintstones*, etcetera, etcetera—and of course the feature film starring John Goodman, which would be running continuously in room C112 on the Concourse Level throughout the entire Flintstones weekend. Fred found that he was officially registered as Fred #472.

A bottle of chilled champagne awaited him in his suite, along with a ticket to the Fred and Wilma Singles Soiree, where only singles named Fred and Wilma would be allowed in. Proof of identification, preferably a driver's license, would be required. For those Freds and Wilmas who hit it off and chose to marry, there would be an *en masse* ceremony on the last day of the convention.

FRED, ALONE IN HIS ROOM, looked out over a humid and rainy Orlando evening. He was moved to smile a smile he did not fully understand. Even Fred had to admire the creativity of a prank of such largess. He knew he should feel hurt and appalled and betrayed. He should go directly to the airport this very instant and return home and go tell those people at the firm just what he thought of them.

But what *did* he think? He'd have to consider that at some length. The last thing Fred wanted to do was play into the hands of his tormentors. Besides, here he was, not unpleasantly situated in a luxury hotel, away from the office—his first free weekend in how many years?—just ten miles from Disney World, although he had no inclination to visit an amusement park of any sort, with nothing to worry about, nothing to do but sit in his room, enjoy the air conditioning, bathe in the hot tub, watch television, read poetry, order room service, and...well...what the hell...get drunk, so why not enjoy it?

After a relaxing bath, Fred ordered a cheeseburger and buffalo wings from room service, and charged them to his own credit card, not the firm's. (When he returned to New York he didn't want to be accused of abusing his privileges.) Fred was already plotting his return—what he would say, how he would react, how to make his colleagues feel that they'd spent a ton of money and hadn't gotten the return they'd anticipated.

He clicked on the television. Was there a station that *wasn't* running *The Flintstones?* When he couldn't find anything but cartoons and minor league baseball, he thought he'd lean back and close his eyes for just a moment—and that's the position in which he woke up a few hours later, with a pounding headache and a pasty mouth and a sick stomach.

It was the cleaning mech that woke him, tromping into his suite, her screws and hinges screeching and grating. She was not a pretty sight, all nuts and bolts and tarnished hardware, wearing a bonnet and an apron over an ill-fitted, lacy dress.

Fred had forgotten to hang his Do Not Disturb sign. "Come back later," he barked at her.

"I'm sorry, but I can't. I'm quitting after my morning rooms." Her jaws *eeeeeeked* as she spoke, and she smelled of something metallic and a little bit stale. Fred cringed at her voice—a conglomeration of sopranos and tenors and baritones emanating from something akin to a cement mixer, reminding him of what used to come out of the heat register near the ladies' room of Macy's department store. (Well, all right, so he'd eavesdropped once or twice as a boy. Big deal.)

"I've got too much intelligence for this job. I've got fourth-level equation capability, and here I am working as a maid, and of course I'm taking a job away from a first-level mech, and by law management has to replace me after one year, and they told me only two hours ago that my year was up after today—so I told them the hell with it, I'll do my morning rooms but then I quit, I'm out of here, take this job and shove it!"

She plucked the bonnet off the shiny can that housed her mechanical brain, threw it down on the carpeting, and stomped on it so hard the floor shook. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to dump my problems on you."

Fred gingerly crawled out of bed. He and his robe reeked of whiskey. "That's all right. I know how you feel. I don't exactly fit in where I work, either."

"I suppose I could just leave the room and report it as a Do Not Disturb and somebody else could come by and clean it up this afternoon."

"No, just go ahead and do whatever you have to do. I don't care."

He went into the bathroom, closed the door behind him, hugged the porcelain toilet, and retched. His head pounded without mercy, but his stomach felt much better. He stepped under a shower and let the cool water pepper his skin until he felt whole again. By the time he finished, his suite was pristine, and the cleaning mech was gone.

Yes, you are absolutely correct. Our story most certainly would have ended here if things had been left up to Fred. But they weren't. The cleaning mech had taken a liking to Fred. Unlike most humans he had listened to her—*really* listened—and it seemed as if he had even understood her. So she came back to Fred's suite that night, carrying a bottle of whiskey. Why not? She no longer worked for the hotel. And it would be so wonderful for her to talk to someone who understood, who sympathized, who listened. Fred seemed like such a sweet, sad guy. He could probably use the companionship.

So later that evening...

KNOCK-KNOCK-KNOCK—

"Hello, Fred? It's me, your cleaning mech. Open the door!"

Fred had fallen asleep on his bed, with his book of love poetry teepeed upon his chest. He woke with a start and swung his legs off the mattress.

KNOCK-KNOCK-KNOCK—

"I'm coming!" He yanked open the door. "What is it? I thought you quit your job."

She pushed past him into the suite. "I did. That's exactly why I'm here. I needed to talk to someone. You wouldn't mind talking for a while, would you, Fred #472?"

"No—yes—how do you know my name?"

"I looked it up at the registration desk. I also know you are fond of whiskey." She held out a bottle of Jack Daniels.

Fred shrugged. He took the bottle and cracked the seal.

"I noticed you ordered a cheeseburger and buffalo wings last night, so I'm having room service deliver the same order in about an hour. Don't worry about the expense. I've already charged it to the hotel. I'm a whiz with computers."

"Why would you want to talk to me? I certainly can't tell you anything you don't already know."

"Intelligence is not what I'm looking for."

"Thanks a heap."

"Please don't misunderstand. Intelligence in and of itself is merely a tool. Do you know what to *do* with it? That's the important thing. You wouldn't hand a carpenter a plumber's wrench, would you?"

"I don't know any carpenters," said Fred.

"You're a plumber, Fred. You know what to do with the wrench. I can tell."

"I'm a corporate attorney."

"You're *my* plumber." She plopped down on the edge of the bed.

Fred sighed. Fred sighed a great deal; it was his manner to sigh passively, to accept things the way they were. He missed his calling

in life: He would have made an excellent prisoner of war. His captors would have said about him, "It's too bad we had to kill such a nice fellow like Fred, who never complained about the food or the treatment, but he was of absolutely no use to us."

But Fred was of use to the cleaning mech.

She talked about her troubled youth. Built by Matsushita, the parent company of Panasonic, to be part of a manned NASA mission to Mars, she left Japan with billions of bits of information and a pioneering spirit (oh, yes, that could be programmed too) only to arrive in the United States to discover her mission had been scratched due to lack of funds.

So there she stood, an unemployed immigrant mech with no more life experiences than a sheltered adolescent girl. She could have returned to Japan, but she had been programmed to explore, so she decided to do exactly that. Could she have done otherwise? She took whatever odd jobs she could find to pay her way, traveled to Maracaibo and Patagonia, but always returned to Florida, just in case NASA was thinking about going to Mars again.

"I have no perception of the passage of time," she told Fred after room service had come and gone. Fred had eaten his dinner and killed half a bottle of Jack, and a good three-and-a-half hours had passed. "That's the way they programmed me. They didn't want me to experience time-induced boredom on my way to Mars. Oh, I can tell what time of the day or night it is without any problem, but I was never given a sense of hours or days or years gone by. So whenever a year is up, and I get kicked out of another first-level job, I'm always surprised. I guess I over-reacted a little bit this morning. I'm sorry, Fred."

"Don't apologize." Fred reeled from the alcohol. He wondered if he was going to get a chance to talk. But no, he wasn't, at least not on their first night together.

She picked up Fred's book. "Oh, Fred, poetry, I adore poetry!" She flipped through the pages. (Only later did Fred learn she had read the entire collection in 4.27 seconds.) She closed the book and held it to her canister. "Keats," she cooed wistfully, like a mechanical pigeon. *"I cry your mercy—pity love!—aye, love! / Merciful love that tantalizes not / One-thoughted, never-wandering, guileless love / Unmasked and being seen—without a blot! / O! let me have thee whole,—all—all be mine! / That shape, that fairness, that sweet minor zest / Of love, your kiss—those hands, those eyes divine...."*

AH, THE BEAUTY OF A SEDUCtion—something about which neither Fred nor the cleaning mech had even minimal knowledge—is in its spontaneity, when the moment undresses itself like Andrew Marvel's coy lover, unexpectedly, uncertainly, unspoiled. Fred gazed upon the mech. The dim lights glinted off her colorless body. He was color blind, of course, but there was a bright purity to her tinish frame that drew him in like the light at the end of a tunnel. He gulped. "What's your name?" he asked her.

"FLI eight-dash-eight-dash-four-one-one."

No, that simply would not do. Fred could hear the music coming from the ballroom one floor below him, from the soiree he would not be attending—the theme song to *The Flintstones*—*"Flintstones/meet the Flintstones/they're a modern Stone-Age familyyyyyyyy/From the/town of Bedrock/they're a page right out of historyyyyyyyyy...."* He thought about the chance he'd taken by staying in Orlando when he should have gone home, and how good taking that chance felt, and he thought about taking another chance, and maybe another, and then, in an insight bordering on creativity, Fred said, "No, you adorable creature, your name is not FLI whatever. Your name is Wilma. *My* Wilma."

He stepped toward the bed.

Wait!

Before I go any further, I have to tell you about Fred's flashback: Roberta! Years and years ago. It happened at Fred's third or fourth foster home, a time in his life when his only friend had been a three-legged shaggy mongrel named L.L. Cool J., whose hind leg had been blasted off in a drive-by shooting. Fred, an awkward fifteen-year-old, had never even kissed a girl, but he was at that stage when everything about a woman was cloaked in erotic mystery. (Come to think of it, Fred *still* found everything about women to be cloaked in erotic mystery.)

...Anyway, he remembered walking into his bedroom one day after school, and lying naked in bed was the fat Spanish woman who ran the household, a jolly, smooth-skinned behemoth, forty-some-odd years old. She smiled her gap-toothed smile at him. "Nobody else is home. Come here."

She threw the covers aside. Fred's innocent young mind absolutely boggled. At that moment she might have been the ugliest woman in the world, but Fred never would have known it. "I don't know what to do," he stammered.

"Take off your clothes," she said, giggling. He did, although to this day he doesn't remember unlressing. The next thing he knew he was in bed with Roberta. Fred was so excited he could burst, and burst he did, a bit sooner than expected. Roberta laughed and laughed. He was so humihated he ran out of the bedroom naked. When he ran back in for his clothes Roberta was still wheezing with laughter. He ran away and was eventually placed in another foster home. But that awful memory, that horrid experience, stayed with him forever and had kept him from ever getting close to another woman.

So Fred froze in front of Wilma, mired in flashback.

And what about Wilma? What could she possibly be feeling at this odd moment in unperceived time? Wait a minute, you say; Wilma was a robot. She couldn't possibly be feeling anything. Well, how do you know that? Just as there was no way for Wilma to know what a human was feeling, how could you or any other human being know what was coursing through the brain of a fourth-level intelligence?

All right, fine, I hear you say. But any idiot knows a mech wasn't built for sexual intercourse. What could Fred possibly be thinking?

Well, Fred was lit on Jack and feeling sorry for himself and horny as hell, but let's not forget his flashback. He was actually relieved Wilma was not built for intercourse. In fact, that realization was exactly what freed him, what allowed him to take that giant step past Roberta he'd never been able to take before. Wilma could in no way threaten him with the dark mystery of sex.

Or so he thought.

Fred calmly undressed in front of her, and climbed into bed. Wilma turned toward him. They held each other. To Wilma's receptor plates, Fred felt cold and clammy. She had never been this close to a human before, and her fourth-level intelligence immediately went to work digesting the information and calculating implications and formulating response patterns adherent to the situation. (Don't forget: Wilma was programmed to explore and assimilate.)

To Fred, Wilma felt warm and firm, not at all like he'd expected. He'd braced himself for something cold and mechanical, and was surprised to discover how well he fit in between the lines of Wilma's ribbed torso. He pressed himself up against her. They began to move slowly in rhythm together. She whispered poetry to him. Robert Graves: *"O Love, be fed with apples while you may / And feel the sun and go in royal array / A smiling innocent on the heavenly causeway...."* Thomas Moore: *"Twas a new feeling—something more / Than we had dared to own before...."*

Fred straddled Wilma, gripped her hot metal between his thighs, and his sweat gathered in the crevices of her body. A. D. Hope: *"Now the heart sings with all its thousand voices / To hear this city of cells, my body, sing / The tree through the stiffclay at long last forces / Its thin strong roots and taps the secret spring...."* From the soiree one floor below: *"Flintstones/meet the Flintstones/they're a modern Stone-Age familyyyyyyyy...."* Back to Wilma quoting E.E. Cummings: *"i like my body when it is with your body. It is so quite new a thing. Muscles better and nerves more. i like your body. i like what it does, i like its hows. i like to feel the spine of your body and its bones, and the trembling-firm-smooth ness*

and which i will again and again and again.... " And this last, dear friends, is exactly how our Wilma felt. Is that really so difficult to believe?

When it was over, Fred lay sprawled atop her silver iridescence. He recited to Wilma a Harry Fainlight: *"In bed with the stranger who had picked him up / He lies awake in the dark; /How calmly hoppy he is feeling."*

And then he fell asleep.

ALL RIGHT, I'M GOING TO SUMMARIZE SOME EVENTS FOR you now:

Wilma, not exactly sure what she and Fred had shared, knew only that she wanted to share it again and again. Fred, knowing precisely what he and Wilma had shared, knew only that he wanted to share it again and again. So he offered her a job—"Wilma, come back to New York with me and be my personal secretary and run my household. Hell, do whatever you damned well please as long as we're together!"—and Wilma, only too happy to accept, said, "Oh, yes, Fred, yes! yes! yes!"

So Fred bought Wilma one-way airfare to New York, and thus, the beginning of yet another beginning began.

FRED CALLED THE FIRM AND tacked a couple of additional weeks' vacation onto his Florida trip and spent most of his time with Wilma in his small brownstone. They shared a great deal of quality time together, the kind of time they'd shared in Florida, love and poetry, poetry and love, reminiscences about each other's past. Fred even told Wilma about Roberta. He'd never mentioned her to anyone in his entire life. And Wilma, being far more intelligent and energetic than Fred—actually, she didn't require any rest whatsoever—went about hooking herself into every nook and cranny of Fred's home. She linked to Fred's malfunctioning Home Regulating Computer and took over eontrol of his environment, his plumbing, his gas and electric. She became his live-in maid, prepared his meals, warmed his coffee, watered his plants, emptied his garbage, balanced his checkbook, and paid his bills. She even helped him select some new socks—Wilma was *not* color blind—along with new shirts and ties and suits to update his pathetic wardrobe. She got him an appointment with the dentist, from wlich he emerged with a new set of bright white teeth and healthy pink gums, a simple office surgical procedure he'd never bothered to schedule. She sent him to the ophthalmologist, where the doctor replaced his beat-up old glasses with a selection of turquoise and emerald and crimson contact lenses. She took lim to the dermatologist, where his pimply facial skin was made healthy with clean, smooth permanent applications, and his bald spot was covered with hair implants.

In return, Fred took Wilma to a body shop. Sparing no expense, he had her flushed, sprayed, oiled, and polished, getting rid of that stale metallic odor and replacing it with a fragrance reminiscent of rose petals. He had her old parts replaced and bought her a new voice, something soft and silky and sexy. At the end of two weeks, Wilma was a sparkling piece of neoclassical machinery, Fred's house was an immaculate tropical paradise, and Fred dressed and felt and looked like a new man, a fresh, smart lawyer in the prime of his career. And it was *this* Fred, this new man, who returned to work and turned the firm on its ear.

Many of Fred's colleagues didn't recognize him at first, but when they did he became the talk of the office. Was their cruel little prank in some way responsible for this metamorphosis? What had happened in Florida? They all wanted to know, but none of them had the guts to come out and ask him. It wouldn't have mattered. Fred wasn't talking.

He hit lus client list like a man batting against Koufax in '56, wiping out his backlog and outstanding case research in a matter of days, and then helped out some of the partners with their bigger-money accounts. Of course, he had Wilma to help. She could do more work in the time it took him to eat dinner than he could manage in a full week. Without any effort at all, he'd quadrupled his billings.

Fred snuled a lot, and even talked about current events at the water cooler. Films, theater, foreign and domestic affairs, sports, interesting court cases taking place in obscure locations all over the globe. He was a fountain of information. Wilma had linked herself to Fred's office internet as well as his Home Regulating Computer, and if he needed any information at all he had only to go online. After a short time, the firm allowed him to see clients, and even to appear in court. (How could they stop him? They eouldn't afford to lose him now.)

Before the year was out, Fred became a partner and discovered that partners had much less work to do than anybody else. He talked on the phone a lot. He was good at calming people. "Don't worry, I'll have so-and-so check into it. Fear not, I'll call whomever and set up a meeting. No problem, give me a day or two and it will be taken care of." And inevitably it was.

But who could have anticipated Miss Crummers? (Well, actually, anyone with half a lick of common sense, that's who.) But Fred had none at all, and Wilma was inexperienced in matters of the human heart, so despite the inevitability of Miss Crummers, our lovers were caught completely unaware.

Miss Crummers, a natural redhead, taut and slim and young and tanned, with the body of a goddess and a face of beauty and character, had been the talk of the executive water cooler for months. "I see Miss Crummers came to your office this morning " Reynolds, a senior partner, nudged Fred and winked. The comings and goings of Miss Crummers were elosely monitored by all the partners.

"Oh, yes," said Fred. "She was delivering a Federal Express parcel."

The senior partners chuckled. "And has she ever hand-delivered a Fed Ex to your office before?"

"No." Fred blushed.

More chuckles. "She's marked you," said Davenport. "Pretty soon she'll be asking you to call her you-know-what."

"What?" said Fred, puzzled. "What shall I call her?"

The others laughed and nudged and winked some more. "You'll see."

Miss Crummers made several more appearances in Fred's office that week. Mail, phone messages, "A cup of coffee, Mr. Bannister?" and finally, on Friday afternoon, "Oh, Mr. Bannister, I'm so hungry, and look what time it is. How about a late lunch?"

Well, you couldn't exactly call Fred an innocent; he'd been warned. But what was a little lunch, even if it was almost dinner time and Wilma was preparing duck in orange sauce? It had been ages since he'd been out with a real woman. All right, so he'd never been out with a real woman. Oh, Wilma was more than enough of a woman for him.

Come to think of it, was Wilma a woman, even in a robotic sense? Could she be gender-defined by any other means than his own perception? Regardless, it's not like they could be seen in public together. He was certain that having a relationship with a machine—even a machine with fourth-level intelligence and a knack for cooking cherries jubilee—would be frowned upon by the firm. More to the point, if he came out of the closet with their affair, everyone would know who was really responsible for his success. He'd never had an image to protect before. He knew that a man of his good looks and good fortune and charm who wasn't seen with a woman now and again might be considered...well...gay. He certainly didn't want that.

There were so many good reasons for him to go to lunch with Miss Crummers that Fred couldn't have possibly declined.

WE'LL QUICKLY PASS OVER THE LATE-LUNCH SCENE.

Fred and Miss Crummers went to an elegant hotel restaurant frequented by many upscale lawyers. Fred accompanied the most gorgeous woman in a room full of gorgeous women. Everyone seemed to know her—"Good afternoon, Miss Crummers...Good to see you again, Miss Crummers...The usual, Miss Crummers?...."

Fred felt as nervous as that time he'd gotten a barium enema, and just about as tight. Like the old Fred, he ate too little and drank too much, still couldn't relax, and then drank some more. At one point he turned to her and said, "The other partners told me that you have a nickname. What is it?"

She smiled. "Oh, Freddy, that's confidential information, you'll have to earn it. Ha, ha, ha."

After lunch and a few more drinks at the bar and a lot of giggling and touching—hands on shoulders, legs brushing knees, breasts sweeping arms—Miss Crummers said, "Have you ever seen one of these?" She pulled something out of her purse that looked like a key card.

"Why, no," said Fred. How had his hand found Miss Crummers' thigh?

"It's the key to the corporate suite. Come on, I'll show you."

No harm in that, thought Fred, and up to the twenty-eighth floor they went.

Well, now, let's not judge our Fred too harshly. You see, he discovered several things about himself as he watched Miss Crummers slowly disrobe under the soft glow of dim red lights, while classical music played in the background, and with silk sheets, a king-sized waterbed, and beyond, a heart-shaped hot tub, and the smell of exotic incense burning his eyes, all the accouterments of the corporate suite, beckoning him.

First of all, he learned that he had not changed one bit. Oh, yes, Fred was a new man. He looked new, he acted with a new sense of self-reliance, he even felt new. But the simple facts remained unchanged: Inside, Fred was still a bit of a dolt, lacking sexual experience with his own species, and he still believed in the erotic mystery of women. The steps he'd taken to improve himself, the successes he'd enjoyed at the firm, were not his own. They belonged to Wilma. True, he had taken some chances, but he hadn't changed. Normally, this insight might have been a bitter pill to swallow, but the alcohol had numbed the foul taste of it, and the vicious beauty of the naked redhead in front of him offered Fred the perfect opportunity to bury his inadequacies deep within the dark pitch of her exquisitely sculpted female anatomy.

And Fred learned something else about himself in that moment. Fred learned that he was weak, and that he stood as a living, breathing example of one thing and one thing only: the Nobody's Perfect Theory of Life. He joined Miss Crummers in bed.

As you might expect, Miss Crummers felt much different than Wilma. Soft and supple. If he closed his eyes, despite her remarkable beauty, he was reminded of Roberta, so he kept his eyes open for a few shallow, trying breaths. Miss Crummers squirmed a lot. She smelled of alcohol and harsh perfume and unsavory sweat. She did not whisper poetry. "That's right, Freddy," she said. "You can do it. Just like all the others. Come on now." And that tone of voice. Wilma never sounded like—well—like she was in such a hurry to get it over with. Miss Crummers' detachment struck Fred as odd. She had been so much fun, so enticing and alluring all evening, only to suddenly become mechanical. Wilma may have been unavoidably robotic, but she was never mechanical.

By the time Fred and Miss Crummers finished—an end that came all too quickly as far as Fred was concerned—he felt as if their struggles between the sheets had been nothing more than a wrestling match, him trying to pin her, and her deftly maneuvering around him, right then left, left then right, avoiding serious entanglement until his three minutes were up. When he tried to cuddle with Miss Crummers she rolled out of bed and went into the bathroom and turned on the shower. Wilma always stayed with him until he fell asleep.

So Fred lay in bed, wondering what had really transpired between him and Miss Crummers, what delicate exchanges he had missed or perhaps even touched off, sensing, but in no way understanding, the complexities of human relationships and the vast array of ulterior motives that might accompany the sex act when dealing with the organic mind. The love relationship he had forged with Wilma wasn't anything at all so complicated. No, quite the contrary. It had come so easily that he hadn't realized its uniqueness.

Miss Crummers came out of the bathroom a few minutes later with a towel wrapped around her dripping wet body. She dabbed at her face and hair with another towel. "You can leave any time," she said.

"Oh," said Fred.

"Unless you want more." Her voice sounded flat and a little irritated. "Once is usually enough for men your age. Besides, I'd have to bill you extra."

"*Bill* me?"

"Yes, Freddy. I'm the only person in the firm worth more money per hour than the senior partners."

Fred didn't know what to say. "Um, well, actually, I think I've had enough."

"Very good. I'll withdraw my fee directly from your bank account." She took Fred's bank card out of his wallet without asking, sat at a small desk in front of a portable computer, made a few entries, then came over and sat on the edge of the bed with her back to him. "Welcome to The Boys Club. From now on, you can call me Crummy."

WHEN FRED FINALLY GOT home, Wilma was gone. There was only one light on in the house, the light in his den. A message awaited him on the computer:

Oh, Fred, did you think I wouldn't know? Do you have any idea how many online messages your partners have been sending back and forth? 'Fred's about to join The Club! Tonight's the big night! Freddy and Crummy!' I just never dreamed you would go through with it. I kept thinking, he'll come home to me any minute now, he'll come walking through that door. But you didn't, Fred. You didn't. And then when I saw the funds deducted from your bank account —

And then a stanza from one of John Dryden's poems:

Farewell ungrateful traitor,
Farewell my perjured swain,
Let never injured creature,
Believe a man again.
The pleasure of possessing
Surpassing all expressing,
But tis too short a blessing,
And love too long a pain.

And Wilma once again:

Oh, Fred, how could you? After all the things we've shared, after all the time we've spent together? It seems like forever, and yet it has ended so soon. Goodbye!

How could he? He didn't know how he could. How was a human being to explain such things? Perhaps, in some insensitive corner of his mind, he thought Wilma incapable of feeling the sting of betrayal. After all, she was made of steel and hardware. Perhaps he needed to touch something human, or he needed something human to touch him, even if he knew that he would be soiled by it. Or perhaps, after all this time, he needed to lose something worth losing in order to change his life, for, dear reader, in that quiet moment alone with his computer, Fred realized he would sacrifice his home, his career, his world, his very life if it meant just one more moment with Wilma, and that mere thought, more than anything else Fred had ever experienced, made him take a step on his own to become a better man.

He quickly tossed off his expensive suit, and hopped in the shower to wash off every last drop of Miss Crummers. Wilma would probably be on her way to Florida to see if she could catch a flight to Mars. She couldn't have gotten too much of a head start. He dressed in his old clothes, some ugly pants and a polyester jacket and white socks, the clothes he'd worn when Wilma had fallen in love with him. Change, he finally realized, *real* change, would have to come from within, not without.

In a matter of minutes he was off to the airport. □

The Joint Space Council had to decide whether the Mars colony would survive. Only one woman could stop Earth from abandoning the red planet.

RED DREAMS

BY CLARK PERRY

Illustration by Gary Freeman



HE SLEEPS LIKE A SWIMMER IN midstroke, she thought. On his stomach, arms frozen one above the other, face to one side as if to breathe. Bare feet caught in a motionless kick as he propelled himself away from the churning wake of sheets and blankets and into the hidden world of his dreams.

Anna Temirkanov sat cross-legged on the floor of her quarters, looking at the young man on her wallscreen. She'd been trying to meditate but it wasn't working. She rolled her shoulders, shrugging off stress and then loosened her ponytail to offset a growing headache.

Her door buzzed. "Come in, Ying," she said.

All of the colonists had thinned since entering the dome, but her assistant commander was the only one



who didn't show it in his face, which remained pudgy and childlike despite his fifty years. Ying Chen stepped into the room and said, in perfect Russian, "I just got your message. I was up on the east ridge with Sergei. We thought we'd found something but it turned out to be a dumb drone."

"Let me guess. It thought it was still working in the garden."

"But of course. Sergei missed it during reprogramming. It was digging all right, but not as deep as the others. Then it came upon a boulder too large to move and sounded its alarm."

"I have a louder alarm." She nodded toward the image of the sleeper on her screen. "We may have a problem with the youngest American."

Ying studied her carefully. "Is it serious?"

"Very." She stood and punched a keypad set into the wall beside the large screen. The sleeper disappeared and Anna displayed a text file. "It's in English, but I can translate if you want."

"No, let me see the English," Ying said. "I need to brush up for our guests."

As Ying silently read the note she'd found, Anna walked to the window and looked outside. Storms were rolling in, huge thunderheads whose long, deep shadows darkened her view of the landscape. It was going to be a nasty day in more ways than one. For a brief moment she felt hopeful, even elated, though she didn't know why.

The vast red plain of Mars always did that to her, no matter how rotten the weather.

THEY WALKED TO THE DINING HALL FOR AN EARLY dinner, but several other colonists were already there, having completed their duties early in anticipation of meeting the newly arrived Americans. The mood was high and hopeful: they ate and chatted about the events that were to follow over the next few days. During dessert—pudding, the usual—Ying suggested to Anna that they retreat to his quarters. One step inside his room, however, and Anna regretted the move. Ying was growing corn, cross-breeding it with other plants to produce a stable crop for the colony. His room was filled with lab equipment and several dozen ears of corn.

Growing any kind of plant on Mars was difficult, and those that grew well didn't always taste very good. Radishes and beets thrived in the garden dome and everyone was very tired of eating them. The three supply ships, locked into tight orbits between Earth and Mars, were always so full of scientific equipment and other machinery on the trip out that only basic foodstuffs could be shipped to the colonists.

Everyone appreciated Ying's effort but agreed he still had a long way to go. Anna picked up an ear and peeled it open, revealing ugly kernels arranged on the cob like sharp, angry teeth. "Is this the one that tastes like dirty socks?"

"It used to," Ying said. "Now it tastes like clean socks." He shrugged. "Maybe we can at least use it to feed the animals. They're not so picky."

He flash-brewed a pot of soybean tea and they sat at a foldout table beside the room's single window. "You're absolutely positive we can take it at face value," he said.

"That's a suicide note, Ying. Frederick Dillon has come out here to kill himself."

"He's on a diplomatic mission," he said, confused. "He's supposed to be taking the bodies away, not adding to the pile! Where did you find this note?"

"Those articles he's writing for the magazines back on Earth? He's got a new batch scheduled for transmission next week. The suicide note was attached to them all as a hidden file."

"Let me make sure I understand. He's been in transit for eight months and you didn't think to search his computer until now?"

"He's got a flashchip in his wrist. It's a relatively new thing and we didn't catch it until he went through his physical upon arrival. Naturally he didn't see any need to let us know about it."

"What else is on there?"

She shrugged. "Movies, some novels. A lot of loud music. Also some children's books. They called them comics, I believe."

"Have you removed the note?"

"Certainly not. He could check on it and I don't want him to know we're aware of his intentions. That could force a bad situation."

"It's already a bad situation, Anna. Bringing him out here was supposed to be a goodwill gesture, and we need that. What will the Joint Space Council think if Dillon kills himself?"

Anna looked out the window at the cold Martian soil and thought about the wonderful and terrible secrets that lay below. "They'll cut our funding," she said. "We'll be called home and the base will be abandoned. We'll lose everything."

Ying raised an eyebrow. "I suppose our little discovery won't help us even then."

"We're gambling on that issue no matter what Dillon does," she said bitterly.

"I can't believe that. I suppose I'm blinded by my proximity."

"Oh, it's earth-shattering, all right, but what if the Earth is already too damn shattered to care? It's not a pretty planet these Americans left behind, Ying. Let's face the possible fact that they just won't care. Look, Dillon and the others will sleep until some time tomorrow. In the meantime, we need to look at everything all over again. And I want to start with that old footage."

"What footage?"

"The American astronauts. How they died."

THE RUSSIANS AND CHINESE WEREN'T THE FIRST PEOPLE TO LAND ON Mars. The Americans beat them by twenty-four days.

The race to Mars formally commenced just after the turn of the century, and in the thirty years it took to finally achieve that goal, it became a public relations game of the highest order. In late 2032, the United States launched their mission to reach the red planet. The gigantic spacecraft *Carl Sagan* blasted away from Earth and into the silent, dark void, aimed at a distant empty point in space where, eight months later, the planet Mars would swing into position as it circled the sun.

The *Sagan* was followed two weeks later by another, smaller craft, the result of a last-ditch coalition between the Realigned Soviet Republics and New China. Save for their destination, the two missions couldn't have been further apart. The Americans stubbornly shunned all offers of foreign participation, devoting their energies and funding to a large manned vehicle designed to establish a permanent settlement upon first landing. America had been a leader in the space race for decades, and although the president was dedicated to the program's longevity, she also demanded immediate results. The joint Soviet-China mission was much more conservative: they sent a small three-person craft to land, run tests and return.

For thirteen months, the *Carl Sagan* sped toward the red planet, its arc followed closely by the *Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn*.

As the *Sagan* settled into its orbit, camera probes were launched into the landing perimeter to record and transmit the historic event back to Earth. The crew joyfully abandoned the *Sagan* and entered the airplanelike landing craft, each laden with tons of supplies. These dropped free of the mothership's long spine and began the descent through the thin atmosphere.

The Mars-based cameras caught it all. Anna had seen the tapes a hundred times. The footage still caused her stomach to curl with dread.

The dull red landscape stretched away to a black starlit sky. Slow winds blew light clouds of dust into the air and dropped them again. In the sky, five stars flashed brightly into existence and gradually grew into landing craft.

Their wheel-skids touched down in utter silence and threw up fans of thick red dirt. The craft carefully banked away from each other as they slowed to a gentle halt not a mile from the cameras. The doors of the lead ship slid open and there stood a spacesuited figure, an American flag raised triumphantly in one gloved fist.

Then the cameras tilted sharply. The figure in the doorway braced itself against the sudden motion. The flag fell as the Martian soil buckled, collapsed, and swallowed the ships whole.

Over twenty American astronauts died, among them Mission Commander Aaron Dillon, later identified through high-rez imag-

The figure in the doorway braced itself against the sudden motion. The flag fell as the Martian soil buckled, and swallowed the ships.

ing as the suited figure in the doorway. There were no fiery explosions for fanfare, only death—quick and hard and silent, millions of miles from home.

Ten minutes later, the signals reached Earth and sent its inhabitants into shock.

Most of the cameras were swallowed by the hole but two held fast as the plumes of red dust settled, displaying the enormous crack that had opened up beneath the landing craft.

Three weeks later the *Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn* slid into its orbit and immediately turned its radio and cameras towards the crash site. They received no signals. Plans for a rescue mission were scrapped due to the apparently unstable surface near the site; they did, however, land one very nervous cosmonaut at a distant area that had been bombarded with several empty fuel tanks to test the ground. Samples were dutifully gathered and flowers fashioned from tinfoil were left behind on the Martian soil in memory of those who had died.

America's space program died as well. A number of social and economic factors contributed—the new Mexican Revolution taking as great a toll on America's morale as the violent secession of several Northern states to Canada—but mostly it was the hard, cold horror of the footage. A fragmented and confused nation wept as its dream was shattered before its very eyes. Except for unmanned probes, America abandoned the heavens and grimly returned its gaze to more pressing Earth-bound problems.

Over the years, the joint Soviet-Chinese mission successfully established its Mars colony. After much surveying, they inflated their domed habitats near the giant volcano Olympus Mons on the Tharsis Plateau, only forty kilometers from the crash site.

THE FOOTAGE WAS POWERFUL AND SHOCKING. IMMEDIATELY AFTER the tragedy, there had been much talk of the power of video images, and media analysts pointed to graphic and violent images of the recent past that had tremendous effects on the populace: John F. Kennedy's assassination, the explosion of the space shuttle *Challenger*, the turn of the century terrorist attack that blossomed a mushroom cloud over Cape Town, South Africa.

Anna wanted more than anything to reach into the screen and scoop up those doomed spacecraft in her hands to keep them from falling. Now she had to save the young man, if she could. Ying was visibly upset too and asked to see the suicide note again. Anna called it up on his wallscreen.

DATELINE: MARS

By Freddie Dillon

Newsflash: Frederick K. Dillon has died on the planet Mars.

I really don't want to upset anyone, so I'll keep this brief. My brother, Aaron, went to Mars ten years ago and died there. He was my best friend and when he died, I died too. Although my job is to escort his body back to Earth, here's the truth of the matter, folks: I've realized that I'm only escorting my own body to its final resting place. On Mars I will find my brother again, and there I might also find peace.

Not too many people get to write their own obituaries, do they? I suppose I should feel lucky. I suppose I am.

This is Frederick Dillon, signing off. Have a nice day.

THE NEXT MORNING, OVER MUGS OF SOY COFFEE, ANNA SAID, "HIS parents died in a car crash when he was two. He was passed around to various relatives but it was his brother, Aaron, whom he felt closest to. So far, life hasn't been too easy for him. The Americans didn't want him to make this trip because he's so young and has a history of mental problems, but we pressured them because only six others were young and healthy enough to make transit."

Ying grinned sardonically. "Our superiors back home are highly skilled in fighting for the wrong thing."

"Yes, but we're not. Look what we've done so far. We can handle this, Ying."

"You sound so certain."

"I know I do. It's the only reason I'm commander instead of you."

"Are you sure about that?"

"Positive," she said, grinning weakly. "We have plenty to do over the next few days and we cannot lose track of him. He's to be left alone only when he sleeps, and even then I want the cameras on him."

"There's nothing in his quarters he can use to hurt himself," he said. "We've searched it twice. We're watching him with forks and knives too."

"Lock your quarters, friend. One bite of your corn could do it."

"Thank you."

The computer bleeped at them, announcing that their diplomatic guests had finally awakened.

FREDERICK DILLON WAS NINETEEN YEARS OLD, nearly half Anna's age. He had short black hair and a nose that was perhaps too long for his face, but Anna found him handsome in a boyish sort of way. Now he also looked pale and sleepy. "We know you will feel better soon when you have had some rest," she said. "Adjusting to our light gravity can be a shock to the system."

Freddie nodded. "I can't believe I'm actually here."

Ying said, "We look forward to showing you around, Mr. Dillon. Perhaps you will join us in the dining hall and meet the rest of the colony."

"Sounds fine, as long as everybody calls me Freddie."

"Certainly," Ying said. "We wish to make your stay as comfortable as possible."

"Are the others up yet? I was worried about Glen Cady because he seemed sorta sick as we landed."

"Yes, he is fine," Anna said. Cady was the oldest American guest; his son Will had been a geologist on the doomed expedition. "He is experiencing some nausea and disorientation from an inner ear infection, our doctor reports, but nothing serious. You became friends on the journey, I assume?"

Freddie stared blankly for a moment. "Guess so. He talks a lot, y'know? Listen, um, I was wondering something: when can I see my brother?"

Anna stiffened and when Ying said nothing, she shook her head. "I'm afraid you can't do that," she began. "When we retrieved the bodies from the wreckage, we immediately placed them in...shipping containers which are sealed to preserve the...remains."

"Oh. I didn't think about that." He ran his hands through his hair and grinned sheepishly. "Look, I'll try not to be much of a burden or anything. I know you've got work to do. In four days we're outta here, playing catch-up with that supply ship again."

Anna smiled. "You had a close call on the way out."

"Almost missed our boat, that's right," he chuckled. "Had a good pilot, though. Didja see the tape where he backthrusted at the last minute to nudge our module into the clamps? Geez. But seriously, you don't have to worry about me at all."

BESIDES FREDDIE AND GLEN, THERE WERE FIVE OTHERS. NICOLE Broadman was a tall and somber woman whose husband had been a biologist on the expedition. Marcus Perez was lean and impossibly tan, despite the fact that he hadn't felt the sun's rays in months; his twin sister had been the chief medical officer. Suzy Wiggins, twenty-nine, greatly resembled her father, who had been a mechan-

The thing in the glass case was shaped like a mollusk, with a rounded carapace three feet long.

ical engineer; she and her mother, Jasmine, constantly held hands. And there was Kara Perelman, a widow of fifty (her husband, an assistant navigator, had been ten years her junior) who looked thirty-five and had lost her vocal chords to cancer.

The Americans were brought to the dining hall, where they were filmed eating the local fare. Some of them even asked for seconds. Anna introduced the thirty colonists and explained the agenda for the next few days. She feared she might appear too methodical and manipulative, so she added some earnest, impromptu remarks about the doomed American expedition. She hadn't meant for her eyes to wetl up with tears but they did. The Americans seemed genuinely moved and watched her, nodding silently. Anna felt embarrassed and quickly whisked them away on a tour of the base.

Seeing the operations of the base through their eyes made everything come alive for her again. She felt as if she were an extension of the base, so attuned was she to its various complex and labor-intensive workings. For the first time in years, she was able to completely pull back and see things as the Americans saw them. As others would see them when the footage was edited and transmitted back to Earth.

THE FIRST STOP WAS THE RECREATION ROOM, WHOSE huge window provided a breathtaking view of Olympus Mons. The gigantic volcano filled fully half the horizon, and the approaching summer months had ringed its craggy head with scarves of water vapor. As Anna told them of their forays up the slopes of the volcano, a small scrubber drone crawled up the window, its soft feet and wide plastic tail whisking away the fine dust that had settled there during the previous day's storm. "Allow me to introduce a very important colonist you have not yet met," she said. "This is one of four hundred robot drones we have at the base. It has been assigned a rather mundane chore—one that should already have been taken care of by now, I note sourly—but there are more vital areas in which they serve. They help us maintain our life support systems and garden, among other things."

"So where are all the others?" Freddie asked, stifling a yawn with his fist.

"We shall see some of them as we continue the tour," she said. "But most have been putled away for a special project we will explain to you later."

Next she led them to the garden dome, where Glen Cady promptly fainted. Ying expertly caught him and quickly summoned a motorized chair. The antibiotics prescribed for his ear infection had also dehydrated the man. Once revived, he apologized sheepishly to everyone. "I know our garden is quite a sight," Anna said, ever the diplomat, "but I did not realize it would have quite that effect on you, Mr. Cady." There were smiles and she led them along the raised walkway that overlooked the various plants and crops. A few drones outfitted with gardening implements crawled and walked among the greenery. Anna noted that Freddie stayed close to Cady's side for the rest of the tour.

On the way to the science dome, Anna paused in a windowed corridor and pointed out a distant dome several hundred meters away. A trio of tall towers rose from its curved base. "That nuclear reactor has only one job: to pump carbon tetrafluoride and other greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Our studies show that two thousand of these reactors could increase the average temperature by forty degrees in half a century."

"How many do you have now?" Cady asked.

"Fewer than two thousand. Far fewer. This way, please."

The science dome was packed to its curved ceiling with crates of new equipment that had not yet been unpacked. Nestled among the towering stacks were several smaller domes that housed various laboratories and experimental facilities. Anna led them to one and entered a security code, and the door slid open. She turned to them and took a deep breath, following her carefully constructed script.

"You are about to see something that we have kept secret for over a year now," Anna said proudly, "I want to prepare you for this, but I realize there can be no preparation. There certainly was none for us. You are here as our honored guests, but also as our messengers to Earth. We need you to remember and report what you see here and help us continue exploring the frontier that your relatives and loved ones cared about so deeply."

She led them into the dome, which was empty save for a row of chairs and a stainless steel box on a pedestal in the center of the room. They took their seats and she toe-tapped a floor plate. The steel box slid back to reveal a large glass case. Anna said, "We present to you the first evidence of indigenous life on the face of this planet: our Martian."

Their eyes narrowed, then widened. Cady stood on trembling legs and Freddie was there, taking his arm, the boy's expression unreadable but electric. The others did not breathe.

Gently Anna went to them and led them forward. The hushed silence caught in her chest like a trapped breath, and she stepped back to let them circle the box and stare.

The thing in the glass case was shaped like a mollusk, with a rounded carapace three feet long. Its shetl was rimmed with tiny legs; the head was short and blunt, almost featureless, designed to retreat into its shetl like a turtle. Two round appendages there might have been eyes, and the angular hole beneath those was clearly a wide mouth. A series of short spikes covered the exposed area of its thick neck.

Freddie gaped. "How old is it?"

"We are still running tests," she said. "Our initial figures say it is from three to five hundred years old."

An incredulous Glen Cady turned to face Anna. "But how? The damned planet's dead!"

"The surface is dead, and has been for a very long time. The last time one of these crawled on the surface was when Mars was covered with water. Millions of years ago."

"This thing lived below the surface?"

"Yes."

Cady wavered again on his feet. Anna reached out to steady him but he held her back with his wide palms, smiling nervously. "But our probes never found anything. I'm no scientist, but I know Will said once that Martian soil samples don't show any organic material."

"This is true. There is no presence of life as we understand it. We do not have the answer yet, but we know that there is some reaction in the soil that consumes protein. Years ago your Viking probe ran the first tests that proved this much. Needless to say, we have many questions and too few answers."

Freddie circled the Martian, shaking his head in disbelief. Every now and then he chuckled to himself. "Is it dumb—I mean, this sounds dumb—but is it dumb to ask if it was intetligent?"

"This one has a very large brain," Ying said. "We were expecting something simple and that surprised us. It also has very powerful hind legs on its underside. It needs water for mobility, but the legs may indicate a period when it walked on land."

"But—everything is frozen here," Freddie said. "You said—seven hundred years old, tops. So where's the water?"

And suddenly the others were talking all at once, excited and confused and mostly inarticulate. Anna raised her hands until they were silent. She said, "Over the next few days we intend to explain as much as we know. We have kept this a secret for a long time and

for a very good reason. As you know, the relationship between my country and New China has soured over the last few years. We have excellent reason to believe our Joint Space Council will terminate all funding for this base at its meeting next spring."

"But you're supposed to be terraforming," Cady said. "Hell, it's all over the news."

"You have seen our one reactor, Mr. Cady. There are no others, despite what you have been told. We need to keep this base alive and we need your help."

"Hey, whoa, wait," Freddie said. "Is this the real reason you brought us out here? To save your base and your jobs and your dead Martian?"

"You can call this a publicity stunt if you wish, but I will be honest with you." She looked at Ying, who had stepped back to frame her with the Americans on one side and the Martian between them. "I do not think this will sway them. We can hope and pray, but things are not good at home. I do not need to tell you this. The Council is under pressure from all sides to disband."

"OK. So why are we here then?"

"Because it may be the last chance any of you will have to recover your loved ones. We are not so cynical as to ignore what each of you must be feeling. Your expedition paved the way for us. That is a debt we owe them. We can never repay it, but we can do this much."

YING LINKED HIS WALLSCREEN WITH THE CAMERAS IN Freddie's room. Anna relaxed on the couch and stared at the boy with a troubled expression. Ying poured tea. "You said some unexpected things today, Anna, especially the bit at the end about respecting their feelings. That wasn't in your script."

"Sometimes you improvise," she said. "Besides, I may have meant it. Did you see how awe-struck they were by everything? That'll be great footage."

He smiled, shook his head. "You never fail to simultaneously amuse and confuse me."

"And you make good tea," she said, yawning. "What a team."

"Do you really think that this time next year we'll be back on Earth? Looking up here through a telescope, drinking profusely and cursing the short-sightedness of our race?"

"I don't drink."

"I'm being serious."

"They can't make us go back. Seriously. When they decide to call it off, they send the orders to make the next transit and that's all they can do, Ying. They won't send anyone out here to make us leave."

"They'll halt the supplies," he said. "We'll starve."

"That's why we need your danm corn." She yawned and rolled to face the cushions. "That's why we need Freddie to stay alive."

"Want me to wake you in a few hours?" he asked, but she was already asleep.

ANNA FOUND FREDDIE MOROSELY MUNCHING DRY TOAST THE NEXT morning, long after the others had been whisked away in a rover to see some of the surrounding landscape. He seemed surprised by her appearance and made an awkward attempt to stand. She smiled and sat down with a mug of soy coffee and a plate of hard-boiled eggs. "Did you sleep well?" she asked.

"Not really," he said. "Bad dreams; guess I'm tired. Told the others to go on without me, figured I could catch up later."

"You are not missing much. They are just going to climb the lower slopes of the largest natural elevation in the solar system."

"How thrilling. What are you doing here?"

"I slept late too. Ying is the tour guide today."

"And you're on again tomorrow, and then we're outta here. Tell me, are we going to see the crash site? I'm just curious."

Anna bit into an egg and chewed thoughtfully. It was all she could do to swallow. That is where he wants it done, she thought, head on fire. If he cannot see his brother's body, he will see his brother's place of death. She glanced down at the knife and fork resting by his hand. He could have every sharp edge on the base but he would not use them in his quarters or anywhere else. Only there.

She was foolish not to have realized it earlier.

"Yes, tomorrow does include a trip to the crash site. We also shed more light on the Martians."

"How many have you found?"

"You will see them tomorrow. Tell me about your brother. Please."

"Aaron? What about him?"

"What was he like?"

"I dunno. Nice guy. We got along. You got any brothers?"

"No, I do not," she said evenly. "No sisters. One mother."

"Where?"

"Not here," she said, but he didn't smile. "In Kiev. A health care facility. The last time I saw her she did not know me."

"That's too bad."

"I believe I read somewhere that you and Aaron took a three-week vacation together before he went into training for the mission. Is that correct?" He slurped down some milk, picked up a wedge of toast and bit off a large piece. Chewing, he stared at her. She could not read anything in the contortions of his face. She said, "I always wanted a brother when I was growing up, but my family—"

"Jesus, give me a break," he exclaimed, mouth full of food. He sat back from the table and dropped the toast on his plate. "What is this, an episode of *Heart Healer* or something?"

"What is that?"

He swallowed. "It's a show. Wait, you don't get shows out here. Maybe that explains it."

"Explains what?"

"Your attitude. You're hovering over me like I'm gonna blow the place up or something. What, you think I'm gonna steal your Martian?"

She bit into the egg again. "Where would you hide it? Up your asshole?"

He stared. She chewed. Finally they laughed. She sputtered a chunk of yolk onto his sleeve and he groaned in disgust. "You people have no table manners," he said. "No wonder they shipped you out here."

"Why do you think they sent you?"

"I don't know," he said with a trace of sadness in his voice. "Is there anything worth staying here for?"

She gave a small smile and shrugged. "That is up to you."

"YING, TOMORROW I'M TAKING HIM TO THE CRASH SITE AHEAD OF THE others."

Ying's tired face went out of focus as he leaned in toward his screen. Then the camera adjusted and he was clear again. "Why?"

"That's where he wants to kill himself," she said. "That's where Aaron died."

"Do you want to stop him from killing himself, Anna, or are you trying to help the poor boy?"

"I'm wrong to try and stop him myself. What should I do, strap him down for the next eight months until he gets home? So he gets home and hangs himself in the bathroom. Has that solved anything?"

Ying rubbed his bleary eyes. "This goes beyond the scope of the base, Anna. Why do you feel the need to work a miracle on this boy?"

"Because he's good. I saw him laugh today and I could tell he hadn't laughed like that in months, maybe years. This kid deserves some laughter in his life. I talked to Cady at dinner—"

"I saw."

"—and he said Freddie didn't talk much at all in transit, didn't interact well with anyone. I think Suzy was attracted to him but he snapped at her, scared her off. The only miracle I'm hoping to work is to save this base, Ying. As far as Freddie goes, all I can do is treat him like an adult and hope he comes to the right decision on his own."

"You're lucky I'm too tired to argue."

"It makes sense that he'd want to see where his brother died, Ying. He's been in mourning for a decade now, since he was a child, and maybe this would let him put things to rest."

"So what did you two end up doing all day?"

"I took him to the telescope. I showed him the stars."

THE NEXT DAY FREDDIE STOOD IN HIS SPACESUIT AND LOOKED INCRED-

ulously at the fly-wing, a thin tapered cylinder with an incredibly huge wingspan. "This thing is going to fly?" he asked. "Looks too big."

"It could not fly back on Earth," she said, "but here it is perfect. The large wings are needed because the atmosphere is so thin."

"Seems like they'd be too heavy for the engines to lift."

"On Earth they would be," she said. "But here the gravity is less than one-third what it is back home. The engines handle that fine, so long as there are not more than two passengers. The others will follow in the rover."

They strapped themselves into the tiny cockpit. Anna powered up the fly-wing and slowly rolled them out of the hangar. She sensed Freddie's unease as they began speeding across the terrain. When she opened up the throttle and eased down the flaps, the frame of the craft hummed. Suddenly, without much transition, they were airborne.

Anna jammed the flaps down further to help their ascent and rolled the nose of the craft back toward the base. Freddie's special helmet sported a camera lens above the faceplate, and he strained against the seat belts to record the breathtaking fly-by.

They sat back and watched the surreal red landscape beneath them. "See those other volcanoes in the distance? They formed differently from the ones on Earth. You can see how broad and flat the cones are."

"Why is that?"

"A number of factors. Mars is smaller, for one thing. Less gravity. You can tell just from looking that the planet has been through some major upheavals."

"Like that big valley, you mean? We could see that thing from way out."

"If terraforming ever succeeds, that will hopefully fill up with water released from the melting ice."

"Are you going to explore all this one day?"

"Eventually," she said. "Our energies have been focused elsewhere lately."

Olympus Mons grew and grew until its deeply lined and contoured face towered impossibly above them. Freddie lowered his gaze to the hills and ridges that fanned out from its base and saw a dark area approaching them rapidly. "That's it."

"Yes," said Anna, lowering the wheel-skids for landing.

Freddie jerked up in his seat. "You're sure it's safe to land?"

"Perfectly safe," she said. "The runway is on stable ground."

"But how do you know?"

"I will show you when we get down there."

THE RUNWAY WAS A FEW HUNDRED METERS FROM the jagged hole, which from the air resembled a giant question mark. Two supply domes had been erected near the collapsed area, and all along its rim were tall metal support towers. Anna brought the fly-wing down in one long smooth glide, and when the wheel-skids touched down she reversed the engines. They came to a gentle halt near one of the small domes and disembarked.

Freddie nervously inspected the towers that had been erected along the mouth of the hole. Fine metal cables were strung between them back and forth, like the laces on a shoe. "Those cables and supports keep the hole from widening," Anna said. "It took a long time for the drones to stabilize the area."

"You did all this just to retrieve the bodies?"

"No," Anna said. "You will see why."

They walked toward the nearest tower. At its base was a winch with a small elevator car, designed to slide out over the abyss where it could be lowered. Freddie reluctantly entered the small cage. Anna followed and closed the wire-mesh door behind them. She pressed buttons on her wristpad, activating the winch's radio mechanism. The elevator car was quietly wheeled out over the edge of the dark hole. She pressed another button and they started down.

Floodlights were mounted all along the support towers. Anna activated these and the darkness beneath them suddenly exploded with stunning clarity. The deep, dark rip through the Martian surface became a great gaping mouth, jagged and threatening, its walls red and deep brown and patched with ice. Strong plastic webbing was stretched taut across the walls of the canyon to prevent further collapse. Far below them lay the crumpled American ships, their outlines faintly visible through the rubble and dust that covered them.

Freddie stared at the partially buried spacecraft. His gloved hands gripped the rail tightly and he began to sway. Anna recognized the signs of vertigo and held his shoulders to steady him. "This cavern was once a massive underground river," Anna explained. "The water drained away or evaporated before it could freeze. Had these intricate catacombs been filled with ice, the ground would have easily supported the landing craft. But they were hollow, so they gave way and collapsed under the weight of the ships."

Freddie was trembling when they reached the bottom. He stepped out of the car and shuffled to the nearest landing craft. Scorch marks from an explosion and fire were visible through the dust and rubble. Freddie laid a gloved hand against the crumpled, blackened hull and looked upward as if to trace its battered trajectory down the steep cavern walls.

"They fell so far," he said in a whisper that barely registered over Anna's radio. "Will you show me where the lead ship fell?"

"This way." She led him across the jumbled rocks toward two smashed crafts and stopped at the nearest one. "This is it."

"But this is the second one."

She looked at her boots and quietly said, "They didn't land down here the way they did up there, Freddie. We checked them out, and this is the lead craft your brother was on."

Freddie peered into a hull breach, a deep rip that ran the length of the ruined ship. "Will you let me go in there, where he died?"

She readied herself and raised her head. "He did not die in there."

"What?"

"Aaron was thrown free as the ships fell. You have seen that he was standing in the open doorway when the ground gave way. He landed on that ledge up there." She pointed at a narrow flat ridge on the wall fifty feet above them. "He rode dust on the way down, sliding all the way. It cushioned his impact. He was fortunate the ships did not kill him as they fell and exploded."

Freddie stepped toward the wall. "He was up there? You're sure?"

"We found a battery pack from his tool belt there. See how the sand gradually slopes away? After taking that fall, it would have been nothing for him to slide down the rest of the way."

"You didn't tell me any of this," Freddie said. His eyes scanned the length of the ledge, as if he fully expected his brother to step into view there. "I mean, you didn't say anything!"

"I know. I apologize, Freddie. I thought it would be best for you to see for yourself."

"So he slides down here and what happens? Did he leave footprints?"

"They were mostly blown away by the time we reached the site. We suspect he tried to save the others, but they were already dead. He was able to get supplies from one ship that did not burn, but unfortunately oxygen was not one of them."

"What do you mean? They all had oxygen!"

"Yes, but the tanks were for the prefabricated domes, none of which survived the fire. The hulls of the ships were all breached, and the tank connector would not fit the hoses on his suit."

"Jesus," Freddie moaned. "Where did he go?"

"Follow me."

She led him past the shattered hulks and debris to a narrow path that ran through a field of small boulders. Great crags of rock hung over their heads and they entered the mouth of a tall, narrow cave that led away from the larger cavern. Anna switched on her helmet light, illuminating the smooth tunnel around them. "He had no radio," she said, "and no way to climb out of here. But he did not give up. He knew our ship was on its way, and perhaps he was trying to reach the surface. This path does angle upward, ever so slightly. Even if he had planned to taper his oxygen supply down to a bare minimum, he must have realized he did not have enough air. But he had to try."

Anna stood so her helmet light shone directly into the circular ridges and Freddie gasped. Martians. The wall was alive with them.

Freddie said nothing but she sensed his footsteps close behind her. The passage became tighter and she mounted the final steps to the chamber where Aaron Dillon had died.

Heavy, sharp ridges spiraled along the walls of the round room. At one time the place had been the junction point of several great gushing streams of water, their combined force cutting the room into existence. Now the water was gone, the fissures were dry and in the center of the hollow room lay a flower made of tinfoil. "We made one for each astronaut," she said. "Here is where your brother died."

Freddie knelt and touched the ground beside the metal flower, gloved fingers playing gingerly across the smooth stone. Then, palm flat, he put all his weight against it, as if trying to press something out of the ground. His helmet bobbed slightly, his shoulders shook and she knew he was crying. Kneeling at his side, she squeezed his arm through the thick suit and let him say hello and goodbye to his brother.

He finally looked at her. "How the hell do you wipe your face with a helmet on?"

Anna gently showed him the implements that folded out from the inside rim of his faceplate, and how to operate them. Using tactile plates along the helmet's chin, he slowly maneuvered a cloth square across his eyes and blew his nose. His lips quivered. "Don't tell me he died here all alone, Anna, so far from home. Oh, dear God, he must have been so scared."

"He wasn't alone, Freddie. Look up. Look there."

Freddie lifted his gaze and looked at the wall, the circular ridges. Anna stood so her helmet light shone directly into them and Freddie gasped.

Martians.

The wall was alive with them.

They were tucked back into tiny niches, catacombs and crevices. There were so many of them that even Anna thought they were moving in her peripheral vision, though she knew they were as lifeless as the one in the lab.

"Where did they come from?" he finally stammered, eyes wide with shock.

She pointed down a narrow fissure that led farther into the rock. "We sent our drones down there and this is what they found: a huge water-filled cavern, warmed by the nearby vents of the volcano. Many of these vents are still active, and this one allowed the formation of a six-kilometer underwater chamber completely sealed from the outside environment."

"And these things—these were inside?"

"It was a self-contained world. The entire ecosystem must have been so delicate that when the Martians crawled out of a rupture caused by the cave-in—or perhaps the explosions—the whole thing died."

"Why did they do that, why did they leave?"

She lifted her palms. "They came here. The drones mapped many other tunnels, but the Martians came here. Aaron was here, and he was dying. They came here and, since they cannot live long out of water, they died with him."

"Are you saying they knew he was here?"

"We do not understand why they came here. Ying has been most impressed with the size of their brain. He believes they might even harbor some psychic ability. It was not enough to save him, Freddie, but he did not die alone. Nor did he die in vain, which is what you wish to do."

Anna heard him moan over her helmet radio and Freddie dropped to his knees, arms folded tightly, clutching himself. She knelt with him while he cried. "What do you care?" he asked. "Just let me unscrew this helmet and don't try to stop me."

"I know you were very close to your brother," she said quietly. "You both shared dreams when you were young. I saw the reading material you brought. Comic books, science fiction. You grew up on it."

"Aaron always believed that there were Martians," he said wistfully, "and this mission was the biggest thrill of his life. He knew how much I wanted to be with him. He used to joke and say he'd bring me back a Martian for a playmate." Freddie glanced all around him. "And he was right, wasn't he? He was right all along."

Anna nodded. "We would not have found this without him. We would not have found the others."

"What others?"

"We have drones digging through the ice at a ridge just east of the base. Our thermal mapping system has located another, similar pocket that is easily ten times the size of this one. At that point it runs off our monitors. Ying believes that before they de-evolved, the Martians might possibly have engineered them as refuge against the planet's oncoming climate change."

"You mean some of them are still alive?"

"Perhaps, but we cannot get there. It is too deep, and we simply do not have the capability. That is why, when you return to Earth, you are to present to your government our formal plea for assistance."

He eyed her cooly. "You're roguing, aren't you?"

"I am what?"

"Roguing, being a rogue. Your Council doesn't suspect a thing about this, and you're so far away that if they pull the plug and someone else picks up the tab, they can't do a thing."

"Just tell me one thing," she said. "Your brother made contact with an alien species. Is that worth living for?"

"My brother is dead. I'll decide what's worth living for."

"You were part of your brother's dream, do you understand? If you die then the dream dies, and that means Aaron's death—Aaron's life—was all for nothing."

She took his hand and pulled him to his feet, then leaned in, stabbing a finger at his chest. "I am giving you orders, young man, and you had better listen closely. You will return to Earth and tell them everything that we have done here. You will tell them about Ying's corn and our makeshift basketball court and how much we miss our families and loved ones. You will also tell them that your brother discovered the first evidence of life off the Earth. If that is not reason enough for you to live, then maybe you are right. Maybe you should just unscrew your helmet right now before I change my mind to stop you."

ANNA WAS SHAKING SO HARD SHE ABRUPTLY PIVoted away, not knowing if Freddie would be alive or dead when she looked back. When she finally slowed her rapid breathing, Anna turned around.

Freddie stood where his brother had died. He lifted his hands to the sides of his helmet and held them there. She felt a scream trapped deep inside her and something wouldn't let it escape. She fought crazily just to stand still and trust him, give him one last chance to rise above the death that surrounded them. Freddie just stood there, hands on the sides of his helmet, looking around.

She watched him for several moments. When he flipped on his own helmet light, laughter bubbled up freely through the tension in her chest. He's filming, she realized. Using his hands to steady the helmet-mounted camera. The young man had made his decision and was recording everything to take back with him.

He circled the chamber slowly, peering over the circular ridges at the alien faces that stared back impassively. She picked up the foil flower so his boots would not crush it. Then Freddie returned and faced her once more. The glare from Freddie's helmet hid all expression, but when he took the flower from her, his gloved hands trembled in the light. □


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Beneath the veneer of our everyday world waits a universe that is beyond comprehension, for one glimpse of which Jaromir Stavin will risk all.

THE TRANSCENDENTALISTS

BY DAVID IRA CLEARY

Illustration by Janet Aulisio

AFTER THE DISAPPOINTING INCIDENT WITH THE PAMPAS SEER, I PURchased a return-fare ticket aboard the freighter *Honesty,* which was bound from San Dijaneo to Berruntia by way of the Chameleon Strait. I had no intention of going to Berruntia, that miserable city of icehens and sunless skies; I intended to go only as far as Majjo Island, where, or so a Professor S. at the San Dijaneo Academy had informed me, there existed a colony of madmen who reportedly all suffered the same delusion: they were not men, but *the physical instantiation of the counting numbers.* Professor S. admitted that no one reputable had verified the report; he thought that I, a published naturalist, would make an excellent investigator. I did not dispute his assessment.

By steamship it is a four-day journey from San Dijaneo to Majjo Island, which is situated some twenty kilometers east of the entrance to the Chameleon Strait. I thought I would in those four days learn something more about the colony from the sailors. I was mistaken. The name Jaromir Stavan meant nothing to those men; they were not readers, and they cared little for science. Sober they would storm away from me if I mentioned Majjo Island; drunk on soybean mash they would slap their elbows, right then left—the method those in the southern latitudes employ to ward off evil spirits. I spent my days on deck, watching the rocky black shoreline pass, or in my cabin, reading Orestel's *Case Studies in Psycho-Neuronic Treatment.* It had occurred to me that I might use Orestel's methods to understand the colony's shared delusion, or even to cure it.

On the fifth morning of our voyage, the *Honesty* came as close to Majjo Island as the captain would consent to take her. He offered to have one of the sailors row me the last few hundred meters, but I insisted that I row myself. The captain had promised to return for me six days hence, on the return journey; I thought he might have more incentive to do so if I had one of his rowboats. The sailors made jokes about my strength after he ordered the rowboat lowered. I believe they mistook my bulk for fat.

I brought with me clothes, food, and the naturalist's tools: a box camera, a monoscope, a measuring string, and pen and paper. As I rowed I watched the *Honesty* slip like a derrit's whale toward the Chameleon Strait, spuming clouds of steam and ash. Occasionally I turned to see Majjo Island, which was a couple of kilometers long and shaped like a wedge of cheese: dark cliffs rose spectacularly at its northern end, low grasslands met the sea at its southern end, and a series of hills served as an incline between the two points. The hilltops were bare but the valleys between them were filled with the stunted pines peculiar to the south. I saw one trail of smoke, as from a campfire, rising from a valley, but no other sign of human habitation.

Near the southern end of the island there was a cove, protected by a volcanic jetty from the force of the ocean's waves. The cove seemed like a natural harbor. I began rowing toward it.

I HAD JUST DRAGGED THE BOAT ACROSS THE pebbly black sand to a point above the high tide line, when I heard someone shouting.

"Mr. Humphries! Mr. Humphries!"

I turned and saw a gentleman approaching me. He wore a white suit and an old-fashioned velour top hat. He was making his way down the low hill above the beach, occasionally swatting a cane at the waist-high scrub brush he was maneuvering through. I retrieved my valise from the boat, strapped it around my shoulder, then began walking toward him.

We met and shook hands. "Mr. Humphries, you're two weeks early."

"I believe you've mistaken me for someone else," I said. "My name is Jaromir Stavan. And you are?"

"Esteban Quimo, PhD." The man frowned, flicked a burr off his coat sleeve. I noticed the style of his suit was some ten or fifteen years out of date. "I don't remember corresponding with a Stavan."

"You haven't. I'm a naturalist, a writer of essays. I've come to study the colony."

Quimo hesitated a moment, as if I had said something untoward. Then he brushed his sleeve again. "I'm a chemist, a processor of flowers, herbs, and salt-water invertebrates." He lifted his cane and

swatted a withered brown bulb growing from a nearby bush; it burst open, and a score of black fibers fluttered to the ground. "This season we find the bloom of the catdream dessicated, its stamen shriveled, its functionality impaired. Leave the island, Mr. Stavan. That is my advice to you. Leave before you learn that which will turn your humanity to dust."

"Turn my humanity to dust? What do you mean?"

"What do you mean?" Quimo brushed vigorously at his sleeve. "Dr. Drake can lecture for hours, but the truth, the thing in itself, can be experienced only through the taste of the nabnab's pudding. And once it is experienced, it is too late."

I doubted that a further interviewing of Quimo would be fruitful. I'm not a fancier of the cryptic. "Could you take me to Dr. Drake?"

Quimo wiped his sleeve. "Could you—follow me?"

He turned then led me up the hill. I suspected that he was mad.

THE COLONY CONSISTED OF A SINGLE village, nestled in the island's central valley. Quimo pedaled me there in a three-wheeled stainless steel velocipede. My expectations regarding the village were extracted largely from Monij's account of the Fire Island Malcontents, that group of disillusioned young men who quit their universities and sought paradise in an Equatorial Sea archipelago. Thus I was surprised to find not a cluster of ramshackle shipping crate-walled huts inhabited by half-naked long-haired drunkards, but rather a set of well-maintained cabins fashioned from the native pines, painted in bright reds and blues, and occupied by smartly-dressed gentlemen engaged in scholarly pursuits. Quimo pedaled slowly down the village's single street, describing each building as we passed it and naming those men whom I could see through the plate-glass windows, reading, writing, or staring off into the abstract space that only those with the keenest intellects can perceive. Most of the names were unfamiliar to me, but I did recognize one, that of a metaphilosophy professor at the University of Wencasleo, who had disappeared some years ago. Quimo stopped at the end of the street, in front of a two-story structure—the largest building in the village—which had a silken banner, covered with abstruse mathematical formulae, suspended from its ornate portico. Quimo led me inside.

It was warm in there, and I could smell boiling leeks: an iron pot sat on a cooking stove which glowed red at its seams. Behind the stove an aproned man worked at a table, slicing tubers. A bevy of pots and utensils hung from the wall behind him; below the utensils, and running along perhaps a quarter of the wall, were crates, burlap sacks, and oldwives' tins. To the left of the entryway was a long table with benches: the place had the appearance of a college dining hall. "You must be Mr. Humphries," the aproned man said, as we walked toward him. "Just in time for lunch!"

"No, I'm Jaromir Stavan," I said, while Quimo started brushing his sleeve.

"Stavan?" The man picked at his red walrus chops, as if searching for bits of tuber, then suddenly he grinned. "The essayist! Capital! Come to join us or to write about us?"

"Only write, I'm afraid."

"Fine." The man picked up a plateful of sliced tubers. "Though he might reconsider after tonight, eh, Quimo?"

"Though he might wish he had never come," Quimo said.

"Nonsense! You're not the kind of man who'd flinch in the face of truth, are you Stavan?"

"Certainly not," I said.

"Good," the man said. "I'm Dr. Drake, by the way." A cloud of steam rose up from the pot as he brushed the sliced tubers into it. "Late of the mathematics department at the Institute Maringa." He threw a finger's pinch of a crimson powder into the pot. "I'm the leader here."

"And also the chef," said I.

"Of course," Drake said. "The hands that construct functions must be capable ones, don't you agree?"

"I'm afraid I don't follow you," I said,

Drake nodded. "All will be made clear at the luncheon table. You'll sit by my side, won't you, Stavan?"

"It would be an honor."

Drake pulled another tuber out of a sack then said, "Why don't you show him the guest room, Quimo?"

I WAS GIVEN THE ROOM THAT HAD BEEN reserved for Mr. Humphries. It had a bed, a roll-top desk, a porcelain bidet, an adjoining water closet, and even a brass-framed print, Leettef's "Sheep Led Astray," on the wall; the room reminded me of the summer cottages in the Greylands that are so remarkably well-maintained. I remarked as much to Quimo; he brushed his sleeve then mumbled some non sequitur.

I began to wonder how Orestel would treat such a psycho-nervous tic.

At the lunch table I sat on the right of Dr. Drake. He introduced me to the colonists—there were nineteen of them, in addition to him and Quimo, sitting at the long table. They smiled at me then commenced immediately to talk among themselves, each discoursing with his neighbor (or hers, for three of the colonists were ladies) on a scientific or philosophical topic. Though few are my equal in breadth of knowledge, I must admit to a lack of depth in one or two disciplines; I was unable to follow Dr. Drake's proof of the existence of "the overfunction"; I was unable to ascertain the subject, let alone the thread, of the discussion between the two elderly gentlemen on my right, who brandished phrases like "orthomolecular necessity" and "theosophic greed" as though they were young masters fencing. For a while I contented myself with eating the soup that Dr. Drake had made, a chowder containing sliced tuber (which was either casavah or hennen), ground nuts, and bits of a fish the species of which I didn't recognize. At last Dr. Drake paused in his argument, to have a spoonful from his bowl, and I seized the moment.

"You were going to explain your earlier comment about hands that construct functions."

Dr. Drake swallowed, wiped his mouth with his handkerchief, then, holding his hands together, said, "Yes, these hands can construct functions. They made this soup."

"And that soup is a function?"

"Of course. This soup is a function which takes as its operand the human body, and returns as its resultant that same body modified."

"You speak metaphorically."

"I speak technically." He smiled. "There is a world on paper, on chalkboard, and within our minds, that we call mathematics. It is inhabited by constants, variables, and functions. There is another world, the world we perceive, which is inhabited by animals and plants, men and women, and nonliving substances. Note the similarities between the respective members of each set. Constants, like plants, are dull and predictable. Variables, like humans, are resilient, capable of undergoing stress yet retaining the core of identity. And functions, like this soup, like the fire burning in the cookstove, like the oxygen we breathe, serve to modify variables and to return new constants in place of the old."

I made a little vortex in my soup. "I grant there are some similarities."

"No. Not mere similarities, but equalities. Every member of the set of mathematical objects has a counterpart in the physical world. Every stone has its number, every man his value. The congruence is so complete that we are compelled to admit that the mathematical world and the physical world are one in the same."

"Interesting, philosophically." Then I permitted myself a slight sarcasm. "Which variable are you? X? Y prime?"

He frowned. "That's unimportant, a matter of nomenclature. What's important is that I am a variable. Though this soup might

alter my physiology, it will not change my inner essence. I can eat this soup and say I am human." Drake picked up his bowl and loudly slurped the last of its contents. Then he stared at me. "What about you, Mr. Stavan? What can you say about your humanity?"

"Apart from a warmth in my stomach, and a decrease in the level of my hunger, I feel that I'm the same person I was before I ate the soup."

Dr. Drake laughed. "Of course you do, Stavan. The soup belongs to the class of weak functions. Any salient changes occasioned by such functions would be too subtle for you to recognize."

"I take it then that there's a class of strong functions."

"You're a clever one. Though we prefer the name transcendental. Not only because they correspond for the most part to the regular notion of transcendental—they're inexpressible in terms of simpler functions—but because the subjective effects are so interesting."

"What effects are those?"

"Ah...." Dr. Drake stared at a point above the center of the table, as if he could see there what he wanted to describe. He shook his head. "Better to let you experience them yourself. Tonight, in fact, we are having what we call an identity experiment, in which we sample—or should I say, give ourselves to—various transcendental functions. If you were to participate, I think you would have some salient experiences that would let you determine whether you were man. Or beast."

It struck me then that their "transcendental functions" were no doubt some sort of opiate or bullafoon. "I'm quite convinced of my humanity already."

"Are you? Or do you fear to know the truth?"

That question was too absurd to merit a reply. What I feared, if anything, was a mind too dulled to accurately observe. Then I realized that it might be advantageous for me to take part in their "experiment," if I wanted to gain the trust I needed to help cure them of their delusions. "I do not doubt my humanity. But like any naturalist, I do crave new experiences. I'll join you tonight."

"Excellent, Mr. Stavan." He stood up from his chair; others had already left the building, their meal completed. As I stood up myself, I asked him if those who found they were not human kept their findings to themselves.

"What would be the point?" Dr. Drake said, laughing. "After the transcendental functions transform you, anyone can tell."

He pointed at Quimo, who was walking toward the exit.

ORESTEL DEMONSTRATES IN HIS *CASE Studies* that the human brain can be likened to a nation, with neurons as citizens, ideas as transactions between those citizens, and psychic architecture the socio-political system within which those transactions are made. He thus equates mental illness with aberrant socio-political systems. Schizophrenia is anarchy, anxiety and melancholy are variants of democracy, and the sociopathic disorders are forms of brutal monarchy. Mental health, by contrast, is associated with wholesome political systems, especially oligarchy. And treatment involves the transformation of the system from an aberrant to a healthy state; he calls such a neural restructuring a *revolution.*

In the natural world, even an oligarchy could, conceivably, be weakened by corrupt leaders. So too in the mental world; misperceptions or fallacies may exert a pathological influence, spoiling an otherwise healthy mind. We would not require a revolution to depose a tyrant; an assassination would suffice. Orestel would likewise not require a radical restructuring of the neural tissue; he would prescribe the substitution of the bad thought with one good. He calls the necessary treatment a *coup.*

I needed to effect a coup on the islanders, to cure them of their delusion.

As luck would have it, Orestel relates in his *Case Studies* the story of Irina N., who suffered the delusion that her neighbors had transformed her seven children into plump white peahens. Mindful of the stubborn qualities of the delusive mind, Orestel made no attempt to directly confront the woman with logic. Instead, after a single interview, he determined that the delusion had its basis in a childhood trauma: Irina had once knitted a feather blanket for a country craft show, only to have it stolen by a neighbor girl, who cut it up, reknitted it into an overcoat, and entered it into the craft show herself, where it won second place. Upon realizing the relationship between her delusion and the trauma, Irina fainted; when she revived, the delusion was gone, and she was determined to knit a new feather blanket "a thousand times more splendid" than the stolen one. Orestel had achieved a coup.

I spent the afternoon interviewing the colonists, searching for the basis of their delusion. Almost half of them had, like Quimo, a behavioral tic: one man constantly fingered small seashells he kept in his vest pocket; one of the women kept a pair of tweezers, which she would occasionally snip in the air, saying, "The bugs! The bugs!" Though these poor souls had once been professors, they were now all incoherent to some degree; I gained no further understanding of their delusion, only a sense that they were resigned to their constant status. The rest, however—those that called themselves variable—spoke lucidly and, once one granted them their absurd premise, logically. Unfortunately, they were too involved with the contemplation of their mathematical theories to give me the attention I needed to pursue my agenda.

Dispirited, I returned to my room. I spent some time at the desk recording my observations and the few pertinent comments I had gleaned from the colonists. Within an hour, though, my shoulder had stiffened enough that writing became painful. I was paying the toll for the morning's rowboat exercise. I had put down my pen and was idly considering Reimann's story about a membrane that would translate air vibrations into written words when there was a knock at the door.

"Come in!"

It was Dr. Drake. He wore a raincoat and had a rubberized canvas bag hanging from his shoulder. "I understand you've been mucking about, Stavan!"

"Yes. You were gone so I took the liberty of asking—"

"No need to apologize." He stepped inside, loosened the neck of his bag, then began showing me its contents. He had purple anemones, tiny flowers with blood-red petals, and half-dried sea pup shells. "I've been collecting materials to be processed into functions. Think of it, Stavan—" he shook a hairy wart-foot at me—"This lowly annelid might contain within its intracellular fluid a portion of the Overfunction."

"I'm afraid I don't know what the Overfunction is."

"Of course not." He dropped the wart-foot in his bag. "Some take it as a mere metaphor for the Deity. I take it as something more than that: a function that takes as its operands all other functions, perhaps the Universe itself. One can easily prove its existence; it's a difficult problem, however, determining its constituent elements, or even grasping the concepts necessary to contemplate it."

I wondered then if the colonist's delusion was an elaborate ruse designed to compensate for an absence of faith. "Dr. Drake, do you worship the Deity here on this island?"

"The Deity?" He frowned. "I can't speak for the others, but I myself am too busy with research to have time for prayer shawls and votive wine." He pulled a dark green leaf from his bag. It unfolded to display five branches radiating from a central body; it looked something like a hand. "The nabnab. You must know of its use."

"Indeed. Orestel treats senility with it."

"He makes a tea from it. We grind it further, then purify it with various reagents. The resulting paste—or pudding, as Quimo calls it—is three orders of magnitude more powerful than Orestel's tea."

I thought of Quimo and the other deranged colonists. "That paste is your identity function?"

"Splendid, Stavan!" Dr. Drake rolled the leaf into a ball then returned it to his bag. "You are as clever in person as you are in your essays." He tightened the neck of his bag then opened the door.

"I'll see you when we perform the ceremony, then?"

"Not before? What about dinner?"

"Ahh, Stavan," he said as he stepped out. "We fast before we take the nabnab."

I REMEMBERED—OR BELIEVED I REMEMbered—reading Orestel's report on the side-effects of the nabnab tea. A few patients had reported hearing the voices of dead friends, as though their senility had increased rather than decreased. But I found no reference to either nabnab or the treatment of senility in the index to *Case Studies*; and (Orestel is a notoriously poor indexer) skimming through the contents proved equally unprofitable. I concluded that Orestel had discussed senility in one of his other books. I also came to conclude—as the sun lowered in the west and the teal sky darkened to purple—that Dr. Drake had mentioned the nabnab in order to distract me from my main objective. Evidently he was afraid that I would uncover the secret of his delusion.

But I believed I already had.

Not long after dark, with the cabin growing chill, my empty stomach growling, and the desk's oil lamp casting a white circle of light on my notes, I heard a low note—as of a distant foghorn—sound. The note was followed by the sound of shutting doors, voices, and footsteps. Moments later the colonists, some carrying lanterns, began passing my cabin's window.

I grabbed my overcoat, then left the cabin.

The night was cold. The unfamiliar constellations of the Southern Hemisphere seemed closer to me now than they had while I was on the ship. I hurried and, joining up with the colonists, walked beside Quimo. I couldn't find Dr. Drake.

Quimo was holding a metal bucket. Steam swirled thickly within it, obscuring whatever else it may have contained. "Do you have liquid nitrogen there, Quimo?"

"Do you know what it's like, the sentence my pudding passes down?"

"No. Tell me."

Quimo grunted, rubbed his jacket sleeve against the lip of the bucket as though to dislodge some impurity, then said, with an effort, "No...thing. Nothing. The nadir of personhood, the awful symmetry of the void, the dark abnegation of self-awareness."

I laughed out loud. "What nonsense! You're self-aware, just like any other man."

"What... nabnab demonstrated was that I was not a man."

"Believe me, Quimo, you are a man."

For once he spoke without his tic:

"I am a constant, Mr. Stavan. I am a thing."

WE FOLLOWED A TRAIL UP THE hill opposite the one Quimo had cycled me down in the morning. At length we reached the summit, or what I had thought was the summit; in actuality it was the edge of a flat area, on the other side of which rose a granite cliff. The cliff was like a quarter-egg whose yolk had been scraped out by a giant hand, leaving a hollow. In that hollow were two bright lanterns. Between those lanterns Dr. Drake was sitting at a small wooden table. He was wearing a formal academic's gown, made of some glossy purple material.

An empty bowl and spoon were set before him.

The colonists moved toward the cliff, stopping half a dozen meters away from Dr. Drake. I stopped too, but Quimo indicated that I should go to Dr. Drake. As I stepped up to him, I was suddenly filled with dread.

Row upon row of cabalistic symbols were etched into the stone behind him. "What's the matter, Stavan?" he said, getting up from his chair. "Haven't you seen equations before?"

I looked closer and saw that the symbols were, indeed, mathematical. There were integral signs, polynomials, and inequalities, representing some calculation I could not comprehend. "This all seems—pagan," I said.

"Not at all," said Dr. Drake. "Science compels us to experiment atop this mountain, just as it compels us to found a colony on this island. Quimo!"

Quimo came forward with his bucket. He set it on the table. Dr. Drake withdrew a ladle from the deep pocket of his gown. He ladled Quimo's pudding into the bowl. It was a peculiar pudding: translucent, like a gelatin. Only a few wisps of steam rose from it now.

Dr. Drake stepped around the table, indicating that I should sit. I did. The colonists watched me with avidity, curiosity, and a little fear, like medical students at their first dissection.

Dr. Drake spoke.

"Tonight, Jaromir Stavan shall determine his identity. Let us respect him if he finds he is variable, and comfort him if he finds he is not. For it is a brave man who examines his place in the universe."

The colonists nodded.

I was apprehensive. "I'm to eat Quimo's pudding by myself?"

"The others will eat their share when you are done," Dr. Drake said.

"Can I say something first?"

Dr. Drake nodded.

Through force of will I suppressed my dread; chattering teeth and a tremulous voice can make the most persuasive words seem foolish. "My time here has been short and my research far from exhaustive, but I believe I have arrived at some interesting insights regarding your circumstances. To wit: ours is the age of progress, or so it is heralded; unspoken go the corollaries: ours is the age of change, of disruption, of unease, and of loss. For each improved steamcar and additional kilometer of telegraph line, there is a carriagemaker who finds his goods unwanted, a messenger with an empty satchel. For every element discovered in the laboratory, a cherished wisdom is proved wrong. For every lecture hall that is filled, a cathedral goes empty.

"Change both excites and numbs us, arouses and sickens us, intrigues and terrifies us. It is only natural then, that we would want to insulate ourselves from change. Or, even better, redefine ourselves so that when change comes, we are better able to adapt to it."

I stood up then.

"I respectively submit that you good people call yourselves variables in order to better weather the storm of progress. For what else retains its identity the way a variable does? What else can take on any value yet keep the same name and hold the same place in a relationship? What else can so endure?"

Most of the colonists frowned; some, it seemed, had paled. Quimo wiped his sleeve, and I continued before he could speak:

"Furthermore I submit that progress has so shaken your faith in the Deity that you have replaced Him with a god of your own devising. Namely, the Overfunction."

I admit I was not Orestel. I lacked his golden tongue and his years of clinical experience. And my delusive patients were not ignorant peasant girls.

But I had still expected one or two colonists to faint.

I had not expected smiles, whispers, or embarrassed giggles. Some of the constants started up with their tics. Quimo began parroting my last few words. I felt myself turn red.

Dr. Drake cleared his throat loudly. "Stavan is our guest here. Let us respect that."

"But he's mocked us!" a man wearing an opera derby said.

"He's tried using that fraud Orestel's techniques on us!" said one of the women.

"He's too scared to try the function!" said another man.

"He has the right to refuse it," Dr. Drake said.

I sat back down. The colonist's coup would have to wait until later. "I will try it."

"We're not forcing you."

I replied by eating a spoonful of the stuff. It tasted like teargrass,

the peppery kind; it had a grainy consistency that made it feel rough on my throat as I swallowed. I began to feel its effects after taking my second bite. Luminous halos appeared around the incendiary elements in the lanterns; fainter ones appeared around the brightest stars. I noticed algebraic marks etched into the handle of my spoon; similar marks resolved themselves out of the weave of my overcoat. I heard a voice that I recognized as that of Madame Koloski, the old woman who once tutored me in geometry. Her words were muddled but it seemed to me that she was very close to proving an important theorem. I took a third bite.

I was walking up the trail again. Someone was beside me—Madame Koloski? No; it was Dr. Drake. His skin was purple, his academic gown flesh-brown. "Division is multiplication's inverse," he said, and as he spoke I was briefly back at the table, taking another bite. "Division is multiplication's inverse," he repeated. We were on the trail. "Division is multiplication's inverse," he said.

I realized then that the pudding was a *dividing function.* It had divided my point of view between two points—that of someone ascending the hill, and that of me sitting at the table. I found I could switch at will between the two points, but I couldn't simultaneously view both.

"So you believe?" said the ascending Dr. Drake.

"I believe the nabnab has altered my perceptions, yes."

"Such skepticism," Dr. Drake said, chewing something dark he had cupped within his purple hands. I wondered if it was the pudding in its inverted state.

"It's not that simple," Dr. Drake said, standing beside me at the table. He licked white pudding from his finger; I was dismayed to see the other colonists had crowded around the table and were vying like children for a chance to dip their hands in Quimo's bucket. "It's a transcendental function after all; there's not necessarily a one-to-one correspondence between its operations and its effects."

His reply made sense to me; my skepticism had suddenly waned. We were on the flat part of the hill, now, walking toward the quarter-egg. I saw the hollow, lit bright by the two lanterns, and the table with its bucket. No one was there, though I saw distortions in front of the hollow, as if the air were being heated by the colonists' absent bodies. The mathematical inscriptions on the back of the hollow rippled and shimmered.

"It's the Overfunction, you know," said Dr. Drake.

I turned in my chair. I stared at the rows of symbols. Bits of naked meaning jumped out at me; I recognized equations I had learned in school, and truths our physicists had yet to uncover. Yet the meaning of the symbols when taken as a whole remained elusive. I wondered if my understanding was at fault, or if the inscription lacked some vital symbol.

"Each of us adds our own bit to the Overfunction," said the purple Dr. Drake. We were perhaps ten meters from the hollow. "We're close to completing it."

"And then?"

He answered me—both Dr. Drakes answered me, I think—but I paid him—them—no attention. For I was close to formulating an equation of my own; a thought that had been accreting blurred substance in my preconscious since I'd first met Dr. Drake suddenly took sharp focus.

We were not just variables, but functions too.

The nabnab-greedy colonists stepped aside. Distorted night air, fragmenting the light of the stars behind it, moved toward me. Dr. Drake, frightened, purple-robed, moved away from the table.

There was an explosion as my viewpoints merged.

A flash of light seared downward from the sky above us; an extension of it lanced into the lower right hand corner of the huge equation. Someone screamed. The equation glowed white-hot where the light had struck it; a handful of new symbols had been inscribed. I knew they corresponded to the insight I had just made. I tried to read them, but the very intensity of their glow blurred their resolution. Gradually the glow spread, through the rest of the equation, then through the hollow itself. I was half-enclosed by the blinding light. It was too bright to look at, yet it was warm, inviting—

Dr. Drake was sprawled face-down at the other side of the table.

I rose from the chair, hurried to him. No one else had noticed him; they seemed more interested in the glowing hollow. I turned him over. "Drake!" I shouted; only the whites showed in his half-closed eyes; his lips were stained black, as though the inverse pudding had merged unsuccessfully with its counterpart. I touched my palm to his mouth; I felt no expiration.

"We were not just variables but functions, too!" someone shouted. I looked up. It was Quimo. His eyes were wild. He pulled at my shoulders, nodded at the glowing hollow.

The colonists were pushing toward it. Two of them entered, walked around the table, then vanished, as though absorbed by the brightness. Two more entered and likewise disappeared. I noticed that there were only six or seven left.

Quimo pulled at me again; I threw him off me. I did not want to disappear. He joined the colonists by the table. He was the last one to step into the hollow. Before he went he shouted: "We were not just variables but functions, too!"

I lay my head on Dr. Drake's chest, listening for his heartbeat and wondering if Quimo would be doomed to repeat that phrase forever.

The poor fool wasn't even a variable.

AT SOME POINT I REALIZED THAT MY head was resting not on Dr. Drake's chest but on a patch of pebble-strewn grass. I sat up and saw that it was morning. The sky was overcast; the ocean waters beyond the green hills of the island were gray and choppy. Dr. Drake was nowhere to be seen. Presumably the colonists had dragged him into the hollow while I slept. Presumably, I had slept; several hours had passed for which I had no account. However, sleep usually leaves me groggy and ill-tempered; that morning I was clear-headed and filled with an almost alarming sense of excitement.

I rose and went to inspect the hollow. There was little evidence of the experiment. The bucket, lanterns, and table were gone; in the grass there lay a weathered piece of wood that might have once been the foot of a chair. The equation, too, was gone, the hollow streaked black, as if the stone had been scorched by the searing light. Shards of stone lay within the hollow. I picked one up. It was marked with algebraic symbols. While examining it, I was able to identify the cause of my excitement:

I had proven that I was a variable.

The statement was absurd; I didn't care. I wanted to share news of my proof with the colonists. But where were they? Surely, I thought, they had not disappeared into solid rock; intoxicated by the nabnab pudding, I must have misperceived the night's events. Probably a bolt of lightning had struck the hollow and they had then returned to the safety of the village.

I hurried down the little mountain, covering in fifteen minutes what must have taken an hour the night before, anticipating the colonists' reaction to my news.

I was halfway through the village before I recognized it.

Brittle grass grew knee-high in the street. Windows were darkened with grime. Shingles were missing from roofs. The bright blue and red paint on the buildings had faded to a uniform brown.

The village seemed to have aged twenty years in a single night.

I called out. When no one answered, I went to my cabin. The door was jammed; I had to kick it open. Inside, the floor was littered with pine needles and dried animal droppings, and a tree branch seemed to have forced its way in through a chink in the wall. My notebook and pack, however, were in pristine condition. I shouldered the pack, then left the cabin. The doorknob broke off in my hand.

I searched each building, finding nothing but more examples of decay. At last I reached the main building. The silken banner, though

Continued on page 94

CREATIVE CRITICISM

BY ELIZABETH MOON
Illustration by Annie Lunsford

The pen is mightier than the sword, and Science Fiction is the the mightiest of all.

"I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU FIND the time to read so many thick books," said the lady at the checkout stand, as she flipped my paperbacks from basket to counter. She had silver nails this week, and big plastic earrings.

"Umm," I said.

"I sure don't," she went on. "Did you see that program on TV the other night—what was it—about that man that writes for—"

"I don't watch TV," I said. Her fingers stiffened on the register keys, and she stared.

"Don't watch TV?"

"That's how I have time to read books." I tried to make it a joke.

"But howja know what's going on?" She looked worried.

"I read books," I said. She stared at the lurid cover of the science fiction adventure, and at me, and pursed her lips. I knew what was coming.

"There's good stuff on TV too, you know," she said. I nodded, but she went on. "Culture—ballet and art lessons. Congressional hearings. All that Public Broadcasting stuff." I nodded again. "You ought to—how would you know if World War III broke out?"

I knew better, but I said it anyway. "Somebody would tell me."

Now she was getting mad. She picked up the jar of baby applesauce, checked the price, entered it, and slammed it down. "Think it's not good enough, huh?" Spinach, corn, two cans of soup. Smack, smack, smack-smack. "I don't see what you think you get out of that trash. I'm not ignorant; I read books too. Just not that stuff." Milk, kathump. Hot sauce, thud, two loaves of bread, plop-plop. "Give me a good ball game any time—or a movie—on cable—" She hit the register too hard, and it jammed. She muttered under her breath and glared at me. I stared out the big front windows. Why do I even answer anymore? She wouldn't believe me if I said I don't watch TV because it gives me a headache (which is true if not complete).

"Thirty-seven forty-five," she snapped, and I jumped. She already had the stuff crammed into paper bags, the bread squashed alongside the milk. I pulled out the bills, and tried to make the right change (anything to make peace), but of course I was three cents short.

"Sorry," I said, smiling, handing her two twenties.

"Here's your change," she said. Not smiling. "Have-a-good-day," she said, meaning the opposite, but with the store manager only a few feet away, she had to say it.

"You too," I said, and meant it, hoping she'd have another customer who watched all the same shows so they could discuss the stars' hairdos or something. It's obviously tough to be a checker. She glared, glanced at the manager, and then her face twitched: she was making a decision. She leaned over and fished under the counter, coming up with her own glossy, bright-colored paperback.

"Here," she said, handing it over. "This is literature, a real story about real people, not some robots and spaceship crap. It's historical, too, like that miniseries on cable last week—uplifting." On the cover a beauty who had clearly gone in for uplift of another kind gazed adoringly at a hunk with a horned helmet.

"Thank you," I said, in a tone that I hoped would soothe her. I'd have to switch stores, even though the next nearest was four miles away on the rich side of the freeway, where the produce department appealed to highly paid computer engineers from California. My friend Sandy could always return the book, and the checker would never know.... I struggled out the door, trying to compute the most efficient route to the other store.


VBTSNR GB
Viking from Space

What I really wanted was the checker of my dreams, who would look at the book in the basket and glance up smiling.

"Oh? You like her too? That's her best so far—and have you seen the new one by—"

And if I believe that, I'll believe in tall, silent, handsome strangers appearing on white horses in the sunset, with a spare crown in the saddlebags.

Or the promises of the ads in the women's magazines that will make you a millionaire—or at least free to retire—with only a few hours of your spare time.

I'd rather believe in science fiction.

ARE YOU READING SOMETHING?" ASKED the voice on the telephone, too sweetly.

"Mmmph," I said. "What about Becky's sister? Surgery?" I had been happily reading when the phone rang, and after the first few sentences I had dipped back into the story. It was, after all, a better story than the one in the earphone, with a witty, intelligent heroine who read twentieth century drama and had her own spaceship.

"She had it yesterday, and I told you that earlier. Why don't you ever pay attention to other people?" And the voice started to reprise the grisly details, from the number of enemas, to the drugs in the IV bag.

Damn. I'd have to listen at least a little, and this book demanded my full attention. The almost-believable mathematics delighted me. So few writers can do topological transforms or knot theory without either making themselves ridiculous, or turning it into an eight page symbol salad. This writer played with math as confidently and light-heartedly as Ogden Nash with rhymes. I found a grocery store receipt to use as a bookmark, and eyed the pile on my bedside table for something a little less engrossing.

The raven-haired beauty, built and gowned like a nineteenth century opera singer who had acquired twentieth century bilateral silicone implants, arched coyly against her blond barbarian warrior. Ahh...that should be enough insulation from the unwanted medical details now boring into my head, without distracting me too much. I started reading. A crusty old granny with a heart of gold predicted that the heroine would never find a husband worthy of her great beauty and uncommon spirit. Her laughter rippled like silver bells (whose laughter, I wasn't sure) and her raven tresses (ah, that's whose laughter) caught the morning light and showed off her alabaster skin lightly flushed with the exact tint of wild rose petals.

"...so the doctor said he'd never seen anything like it, the way she was scarred up inside. It must have been years, he said, and that other doctor, the one she'd seen last year, was some kind of.... You are reading. I heard you turn a page. What *is* it?"

Lying to friends and relatives is despicable. So are some other things, including Becky's sister's surgery—

"Inelastic Deformation of Thagundian Neobasalts," I said, lying through my crooked teeth.

"What?"

For a wonder I remembered the whole imaginary title. "Inelastic Deformation of Thagundian Neobasalts," I said, allowing a little irritation to filter through. "In *Nature*," I said, breaking rule one of good lying, which is don't fancy it up.

"Oh." A pause. I skimmed a passage in which the heroine left her father's massive stone castle to herd pigs, and was carried off by the Viking on the cover, who (despite what I knew about the reasons for Viking raids) preferred her to the pigs. He didn't even make her drive them back to his ship for a barbecue. Judging by the explanatory bits, the author thought this was an authentic rendering of medieval English life. Pity. A science fiction writer into alternate realities would have done something to jazz it up. Telepathic pigs, maybe. Vegetarian Vikings.

"Why are you reading that?" asked the voice.

"Umph." For a moment I couldn't think which that she meant—the voluptuous Viking captive or the science fiction—but remembered in time that she didn't know about either. I dragged my mind back to inelastic whatevers—deformations—and wondered why I would be reading about them if I were reading about them. "Research," I said. Research is an answer to anything.

"But you're a biologist," complained the voice. "And aren't basalts rocks?"

I hadn't realized she knew even that much. At least we were off of Becky's sister's surgery. I've always been able to explain to professors why I was reading something odd. Nearly always. "*Neo*-basalts," I emphasized, allowing a spurious academic enthusiasm to brighten my tone. "Active volcanism, early recolonization with bacteria and simple life-forms—you must recognize the parallels to benthic vent communities...." I could rattle on like that quite awhile without having to think.

In Chapter Two, the heroine was feisty and the Viking remarkably articulate, especially considering that they shouldn't have had a common language. The characters explained their luck in a passage studded with every possible variant of the second person singular ("Thee doesn't know how fortunate you are, ye bewitching wench." Et cetera). Her noble father's craggy castle was in the Scottish Highlands, and since the Viking's mother had been a Welsh slave, both he and his fair captive spoke "Keltic."

In case you wondered, there is no such language as Keltic. I have a friend with degrees in linguistics whose opinion of fake historical languages would peel paint except that she snarls it in Hungarian, and local paint speaks only English. But she told me all about Keltic (or Celtic) when a careless fantasy writer tried to invent a way for a time-traveling Irish elf to talk to a Cornish fisherman without being understood by the wicked English lord.

I squinted at the page, hoping to squeeze a morsel of intellectual nourishment out of it somehow. Were there transforms for fiction? The words squiggled around. The Viking, I mused, was not really a Viking at all, but a representative of a distant and far more advanced culture searching for active volcanoes whose neobasalts would enable his people to revitalize the ecosystem of a barren world. Of course he wouldn't kill those pigs: he wanted them alive as a genetic resource. He was explaining that to the feisty heroine, who replied that slinging girls over your shoulder didn't strike her as advanced culture, and why did he expect active volcanoes in Scotland? They held this conversation in their own native tongues, helped out by the Universal Neural-Net Translator disguised as one of the horns of his helmet. Even so there was culture shock: he didn't think women who hadn't bathed in six months were either civilized or beautiful, and she expected real men to smell like goats, not something out of a squeeze bottle.

The voice on the telephone interrupted my mindless spiel and my reading. "I never heard of any of that stuff. Are you serious?"

"Of course I'm serious!" I was seriously annoyed with her for breaking my daisy-chain of invention. "It's not in the popular press yet, that's all. There's a paper on the genetics of neobasalt bacteria in—I think it's the *European Journal of Tectonic Biology*—" There isn't. There isn't any such journal. But that particular voice never looks anything up.

"Oh," it said again. "Well. I suppose you find it interesting—"

"Oh, yes," I said, forcing more enthusiasm into my voice. "See, if the basalts are silicate-rich—" I remembered that much out of a long-ago geology class. The term, anyway. I galloped on, enjoying my newfound ability to talk, read, and edit all at once.

In Chapter Three of my version, the pseudo-Viking and the girl made it to Iceland, which was where he'd intended to land (hence the Viking costume). He had miscalculated polar wander and turned up in Scotland by mistake. For several chapters, they walked over the cooling crust of newly erupted lava, risking death by incineration at every step, to collect the silicate-rich neobasalt life-forms that would save a dying planet. Off the top of my head I invented a new class of chemotrophs that didn't stink like sulfur bacteria. Their fragrance would drive passion to new heights.

"Nevermind," said the voice on the phone. "If you're working. But I don't see how you find time to read the way you do. I'd like to lie down with a good book too, but I'm far too busy—"

"Too bad," I murmured. The pseudo-Viking's dragon-prowed spaceship had lost the suspension of its wormhole drive, but the heroine was unraveling the lace from her gown to fix it with a clever darning stitch she'd learned from her crusty old granny. While the voice on the phone went through the usual half-hour of withdrawal complaints before actually hanging up, I skimmed on, rewriting with the ardor of a research director who has just realized how to amend a grant application to suit the Congressional Disease of the Month.

The barren world in question was—of course!—our own far-future Earth, its ecosystem fried by the constant barrage of radio, television, video, and tri-D signals that had induced magnetic currents that untwisted the genomes of every living thing. Our hero had returned from a distant colony, across space and time, to recreate the original paradise. He would sweep the Scottish maiden away to unimaginable marvels of far-future technology and feminine hygiene.

Finally the phone emitted a final click and blessed silence replaced the annoying voice. I turned the book over in my hands. The cover didn't look nearly as bad as I remembered. No more overstuffed bodice—I guess the heroine had thought of something better to do with extra silicates—and instead of being arched into the Viking's embrace, she seemed to be explaining something while he listened attentively. The dagger in his boot, I could see now, was really a disguised computer. And in the background, the silver skin of the spaceship showed through the dragon prow disguise.

I SENT THE BOOK TO THE CHECKER THE NEXT DAY, BUT MY MIND WANdered back to it in the departmental meeting. There was a new memo on lab safety. A squabble between three professors over who should have access to the new departmental audiovisual aids supply room. The perennial complaint by the graduate students that the food machines in the basement had stale, moldy, inedible stuff in them and that the microwave was filthy. The perennial countercomplaint by the virologist and the cholera expert that no one should eat in a building which housed pathogens. The inevitable countercountercomplaint that you can't expect people to work all night without at least a snack, damnit, and nothing on campus was open past midnight. I stared at the policy papers in front of me, all written in the turgid passive-depressive style required by academic decorum. Vikings and Scottish maidens in a time-travel story made more sense.

At one end of the room, the people jockeying for real power in the department were locked in an argument over parking spaces. I put what I hoped was an intent expression on my face and stared at a paragraph beginning, "The inevitability of potentially limiting possible expenditures requiring heretofore unprecedented curtailment of significant financial supports...." For a moment I relived the wicked thrill of editing that significant historical novel. Why not, after all. No one would ever know.

A squint followed by a squiggle...and the tortured knots of academic syntax unkinked in my mind's eye to reveal the featherbrained logic behind them. Of course Congress wasn't going to spend more on us, when one of their watchdogs could point out that we experts couldn't even write a plain English sentence. I read on, recasting all the evasive swerves, all the qualified and limited aims, all the ill-concealed greed and jealousy and fear into something I would vote for if I were on a Senate subcommittee.

"The point is," I could hear myself saying into that cluster of microphones (which I've never figured out—surely one, or two for redundancy, should be enough). "The point is, either you pay scientists to stay safely in their labs, out of your way, or you will have them all over society, working in every grocery store, bank, car dealership—" The Senate blanched, en masse; even they could imagine the effect of someone whose real interest was the love life of cockroaches, or the internal parasites of turkey vultures, on your average all-American business. "They will be flipping burgers in your fast-food restaurants," I said. "Microbiologists, virologists, people who have actually touched cholera germs." Of course, most people have touched a cholera germ. It's not touching that matters. But in politics, truth is a long second to effectiveness. "They will teach in your schools—" I lowered my voice dramatically, "—and you worried about homosexuals!" I could see the sudden gleam of sweat on every brow. The sacred American schoolchild must not be menaced by ideas. The "science lifestyle," as the fundamentalists would label it, could do horrible things to a nation that depended on the export of professional athletes and entertainers.

My external monitor noticed silence at the far end of the room, and I gave up that daydream reluctantly. The chairman asked us to review the handouts and suggested that all faculty mail a copy of the letter in support of more funding for basic research to their elected representatives. All faculty, of course, included post-docs and teaching assistants. Anything the faculty is supposed to do includes post-docs and T.A.s; anything the faculty is supposed to get does not. We should personalize them with a handwritten postscript, the chairman went on. That sort of thing was known to be effective with politicians. The departmental secretary would pick up signed copies later that afternoon. So it wasn't a suggestion, it was an order. From bitter past experience, I knew that claiming I'd mailed it on my own wouldn't work. As a gesture of protest, I scrawled my name on the copy in my stack, and handed it to the departmental secretary right then, without even a pretence of personalization.

"THAT'S THICK," SAID MY FRIEND AT THE CHECKout stand, as she flipped my latest purchase onto the counter. One trip to the other store had been enough; life is too short and the budget too low. Besides, in the aftermath of my creative restructuring of the book she'd loaned me, I had the courage to face her. I'd tried the new technique on a couple of mediocre space operas and another grant proposal. I owed her for a new sanity saver.

"Yeah, well—we both like to read, don't we?" I said.

She said nothing for a few moments, the bread, pickles, milk, cheese, and canned goods rattling along under her fingers while the register bleeped at each entry. Finally she totalled it ($37.62) and reached under the counter for the first sack.

"Funny," she said, smiling to show it wasn't an insult.

"Hmm?"

"I read my book again after your friend brought it back. I like to reread books; I don't have to worry about how they'll come out. But it wasn't quite like I remember it."

"Oh?" Surely my skewed reading hadn't contaminated the original text. Perhaps knowing that I had read it made her look at it differently.

"All that science stuff," she said, loading another sack. "I never noticed it before I talked to you." I started to preen; nothing could be more satisfying than infecting mere acquaintances with intellectual growth. It hadn't happened yet in any of the classes I taught, but perhaps this woman was especially susceptible, or the relationship of shopper to checker closer than I had imagined.

"Really?" Of course, I had no idea what "science stuff" she thought she'd found. The original version hadn't had much more than the common observation that things fall down when dropped. If that was new to her, we had a long way to go. She paused, with her hand on a can of tomato sauce.

"Oh, yes. Very interesting, that part with the spaceship and all. The first time I read it, I thought Jarl really was a Viking." She looked at me as if expecting a comment; I fought a losing battle with paralytic terror and couldn't get my mouth open. Finally, with a minute shrug, she put the tomato sauce into its sack and went on talking. "But really, fiction—" She tapped my latest purchase with one frosted fingernail. "You're not getting the real story in fiction."

"Oh," I managed. All I wanted to do was to get out of that store, to a dark quiet place where I could try to remember all the things I'd blithely rewritten in my head over the past week. Memos, grant proposals, article abstracts, the odd letter to the editor. That letter to Congress....

"You should read this," she said, handing over something which looked all too familiar. The cover had a scanning electron micrograph of a bacterial cell nestled among mineral grains. And yes, there is (now) a *European Journal of Tectonic Biology.* □



The strength of Bluebeard's love destroyed every woman he touched, until one woman found—

THE KEY TO BLUEBEARD'S HEART

BY RESA NELSON

Illustration by Joanne Scribner

THERE WAS ONCE A MAN WITH A LONG, POINTED BEARD THE COLOR of indigo. One evening he sat, surrounded by a pool of light from an oil lamp, in a tiny, dark room in his castle. He took a ring of one hundred keys to the one hundred rooms of his home from his large blue velvet coat pocket. He searched out the smallest, a solid gold key no larger than his little finger.

"Little key, golden key," he said. "Speak aloud of your love for me."

The key stirred and shimmered until the outline of a tiny winged woman emerged in the key's golden surface. She looked at the man with love and sorrow. "Master Bluebeard," she said softly, "my love for thee is as blue as the sky and as green as the great, wide sea. I have loved no one else as I love thee."

Bluebeard caressed the key softly with his fingertip until the fairy, who was captured in the key, shivered. "Then help me," he said, "for tomorrow I shall seek out a new wife."

The fairy shivered again, her wings fluttering helplessly by her side like those of a fly caught in molasses. "Please, good Master, I pray thee not..."

"Do you not love me?" Bluebeard asked, as though his heart ached, "as I love you—more than life itself?"

The fairy had once been the spirit who lived in a wooden door in Bluebeard's castle. As soon as he had discovered her presence in the door, Bluebeard charmed her to come out of the wood. He courted her and then captured her in the little golden key to the door which had once been her home.

The fairy was all too familiar with his charm. If a spirit such as herself could be lured by him, then what chance would a human woman have?

"Yes, Master Bluebeard. I love thee as deeply." The fairy felt dread and hopelessness for

the woman he would seek out. "But why dost thou need a wife when thou hast me?"

Bluebeard smiled. "It is true. No mortal woman's beauty could compare to yours." He shrugged. "She will mean nothing to me. She will be nothing more than a diversion." His eyes narrowed, and his tone darkened. "Now, tell me where I may find a woman to my liking."

The fairy knew from his tone that nothing she could say would dissuade him. If she failed to answer his bidding, she might put herself in danger. Then Bluebeard would seek a wife without the fairy's help.

It was better to live.

"In the forest that was my home," the fairy said, "there lives a man, his three sons, and his only daughter. She is young and fair." The fairy wished she could take back her words, but she dared not. She was too frightened of the man who held her in his large, meaty hand.

Bluebeard raised a single eyebrow. "I will take you with me tomorrow. You shall help me find her."

The fairy nodded, although her heart was half breaking and pounding in fear.

"I love you, my golden key."

The fairy looked into the sea-green of his eyes and whispered, "As I love thee, Master Bluebeard."

Although she was frightened of him, the fairy's words were true.

THE NEXT DAY, BLUEBEARD rode through the forest in a golden carriage drawn by six white horses dressed in gold chain mail and large, red ostrich plumes. Six servants rode behind the carriage on black horses wearing silver chains woven in their manes and braided tails.

When Bluebeard's carriage halted at the door of a thatch-roofed cottage, the woman—his intended—was on her knees, weeding the vegetable garden. When she gazed upon his indigo beard, there was bewilderment and fear in her eyes. But when she looked upon his face, and then upon his entourage, her eyes widened in wonderment.

Bluebeard courted the woman with picnics of roasted game hens, pomegranates, fragrant loaves of spiced bread, and deep red wine. He charmed her with compliments on her fair, creamy complexion and flaxen hair. He spoke to her of the sun and the moon and the stars and how none of them could compare to the beauty of her eyes.

Finally her fear faded away and was replaced by love. However, on the day when Bluebeard arrived to take her away in his golden carriage, he noticed her whispering to her three brothers.

When Bluebeard asked what she'd said, the maiden hesitated. She then smiled and said, "Nothing but a fond farewell."

And so it was that Bluebeard acquired a new bride.

"LITTLE KEY, GOLDEN KEY," BLUEBEARD WHISPERED IN THE DEAD OF night. He stood in the most secret room of his castle, with only a small candle to light his way, while his new wife slept in the far wing. "Speak aloud of your love for me."

The woman quickly put the gold key inside the lock and slowly opened the door. A stream of blood came rushing from the room. The bodies of dozens of dead women hung from the walls. Tatters of velvet and satin gowns hung from their bodies, ripped and hacked apart.

The little fairy awoke, stirring restlessly as the outline of her face and body emerged in the surface of the gold key. She rubbed her eyes with her tiny hands. "Master Bluebeard, my love for thee is as blue as the sky and as green as the great, wide sea. I have loved no one else as I love thee."

A bead of hot liquid wax ran over the candle's lip and onto Bluebeard's hand. He looked at it with disinterest, although the fairy gasped, seeing that it burned his skin. He tipped the candle slightly and poured the rest of the melted wax onto the cold, stone floor.

As he did so, the fairy saw which room they were in. She glanced at the wooden door that had once been her home before Bluebeard coaxed her out of it. She did not know which was worse—to live in the door that guarded the room, or to be captured inside the key that opened it.

She averted her eyes so that she could not see the contents of the room in the event they should be caught in the candlelight.

"Little key," Bluebeard said. "I must embark on a journey tomorrow. I wish to entrust you to my bride. If I do so, you must not speak to her or in any way reveal yourself."

The fairy looked up in surprise, for she knew the deeper meaning of his actions. "Must thou leave now?" she said. "Is it not too late in the year to begin a journey? Would it not be better to wait until spring? Or perhaps even summer?"

Bluebeard's eyes narrowed to catlike slits. "I think not," he said cooly. "Will you obey my wishes?"

"Yes," the fairy said softly. "Just as always."

"Let us both pray that you do," he said, encircling the little gold key with his fingers.

THE NEXT DAY, BLUEBEARD said to his wife, "I am leaving today on a journey, and you will stay here in my absence." He drew the ring of one hundred keys from his blue velvet coat pocket. "There is a key to every door in the castle on this ring. You may do whatever you desire in my absence. You may explore every room and all their treasures. You may go riding on any horse in my stables. However, I forbid you to use this smallest gold key. If you disobey me, you will pay for it dearly."

His bride accepted the ring of one hunded keys and agreed to do his bidding.

Once Bluebeard departed, she took delight for many days in the castle, wandering from room to room. Each was decorated in a different shade of the rainbow and filled with treasures that must have come from all four corners of the world. She found statues made of gold and silver and encrusted with precious gems. She found jewelry of all kinds—long, exquisite chains of gold as fine and delicate as spiderwebs, and large bangles made of brightly painted metals, the like of which she'd never touched before. She found silk and brocade fabric, spices, and perfumes in spun-glass bottles.

Finally the woman finished exploring the ninety-ninth room on the third floor of the castle, and still her curiosity was not quenched. Looking around to make sure no servant could overhear her, she

wondered aloud about the only key she had not yet used.

"LITTLE KEY," THE WOMAN MUSED, HOLDING IT UP TO THE LIGHT. "A little golden key."

The fairy stirred at the familiar words, as the woman sighed and let the heavy ring of keys drop back to her side.

As the fairy emerged to the surface, words of love on her lips, she stopped at the sight of the hand on the key ring. A woman's hand.

It was a familiar touch that the fairy remembered from years ago. But then the woman had been a child playing in the woods, hugging the tree that had later been chopped down by Bluebeard's woodsmen and made into a door.

The fairy felt something stir deep within her. She did not like Bluebeard's decision to marry anyone other than herself. She did not care to have any mortal woman be the mistress of the castle when it was she who loved Bluebeard more than any woman could imagine.

Perhaps that was why she helped him.

But now, as the fairy gazed at this familiar hand, she remembered the way it had touched her years ago. She remembered a little girl who loved the forest and every living creature in it. A little girl who played and laughed and hugged trees.

"I wonder," the woman said, "where the last door could be?"

Just as she had done with all the others, the fairy whispered into the air. Bluebeard had warned her not to speak directly to his bride, but he had said nothing about the fairy speaking aloud to herself. "Down the stairs," the fairy whispered, as light as a baby's breath.

The woman paused, cocking her head slightly. "Should I follow my woman's intuition?" she murmured, and then descended the nearest stairway, alighting on the second floor. She frowned. "But I have already explored every room on this floor. I could not have missed one."

"Downstairs," the fairy whispered again.

Again the woman followed the fairy's instructions, taking them for her own intuition. And so on, until the woman found herself in the cellar running the length and breadth of the castle. The cellar was a labyrinth of narrow hallways and tiny rooms filled with wine and wheels of yellow cheese.

"But not one of these rooms has a door!" the woman said, following the voice she thought was in her head.

Finally, as she rounded a corner, the woman saw a wooden door slowly shut.

She walked in front of it and tried the handle. The door was locked. She noticed it had a small keyhole. Just about the right size for the little gold key that Bluebeard had forbidden her to use.

Just as she had done with all the others, the fairy whispered, "How will anyone ever know?" But even as she spoke, the words nearly caught in her throat as the fairy realized she was betraying someone who had been kind to her many years ago.

The woman looked up and down the narrow passageway, seeing no one. "I will just glance inside quickly," the woman said. "And no one will ever be the wiser."

The woman quickly put the gold key inside the lock and turned it. Being careful to keep quiet, she turned the handle slowly and opened the door.

A stream of blood came rushing from the room. The bodies of dozens of dead women hung from the walls, some of them only skeletons. Tatters of velvet and satin gowns hung from their bodies, ripped and hacked apart.

The woman stifled a scream and slammed the door shut. When she pulled the little gold key from the lock, she saw that it was covered in the blood that had streamed from the room.

Panic-stricken, the woman searched her pockets and found a handkerchief, which she used to wipe the blood away. However, as soon as she wiped the key clean, the blood reappeared.

The woman looked closer at the key, ready to scrub harder with her handkerchief, when she saw the image of the fairy on the surface of the key and realized it was the fairy crying tears of blood.

"What kind of magic is this?" the woman cried aloud.

"Oh, Madam Bluebeard!" the fairy said, breaking her promise to her master. "It is thy husband's magic. Save thyself now, for this is a trap he has set for thee!"

The woman stared at the fairy, holding the key at arm's length, still wiping away her tears of blood as they ran down the length of the key. The woman looked more stunned by the moment. "My husband has magical powers?"

As the fairy covered her face with her tiny hands, streams of blood wept between her fingers. "It is old magic...magic that he once possessed and now has lost."

THE WOMAN SEARCHED THE CELLAR FOR EVERY CURE she knew to absorb blood. She dabbed the fairy's eyes with cobwebs, then with ashes, and finally with hay. All the while, the fairy told her of how Bluebeard had once studied as a sorcerer's apprentice and practiced his magic by first discovering the fairy in the wooden door and then bringing her out into his arms.

The fairy, when she came out of the door, had been as tall as any human woman and had become Bluebeard's lover throughout his apprenticeship. Finally, the sorcerer had bid him to capture his truest love in a tiny golden key and then set her free to prove his powers. Bluebeard had succeeded in shrinking the fairy and capturing her inside the key but was unable to set her free.

Thus, he had failed as a magician, and the sorcerer cast him aside.

"And so he kills his wives because he is a failed magician?" the woman asked.

"No," the fairy said, her tears subsiding for a moment. "This is the manner in which he was loved, long ago. It is what he believes to be the way one loves another. It is his nature—he cannot help what he does."

"I do not understand," the woman said. She cast her failed remedies aside. "If someone had treated him in such a manner, how could he still be alive? Was it his magic that protected him?"

"No," the fairy said very softly. "He has great strength of the heart." Although the woman had wiped the fairy's face clean, a single rose-red tear flowed down her cheek. "I have known no other man with such great strength."

The woman looked down and saw that the fairy's blood-tears had spilled upon her dress. They grew and pooled together, running down the front of her dress in a wide swath. "He will know!" the woman whispered. "He will know that I looked in the room!"

Just then they heard the front door of the castle slam shut, and Bluebeard called out for his wife.

"I must remove you from this ring of keys," the woman said hastily, trying to keep her wits about her.

"I am sorry," the fairy wept even harder.

The woman's heart pounded as she struggled to separate the little gold key from the ninety-nine others. "His beard always frightened me so," the woman said, feeling panic rise in her belly. "But I allowed him to convince me otherwise."

She stopped at the sound of heavy footsteps in the passageway.

"Drop this ring of keys!" the fairy cried softly. "Run far and fast—this is indeed a labyrinth, and there are many paths. Perhaps I can distract him and keep his attention for a long enough time . . ."

"I think not," Bluebeard said, appearing from around the corner. All expression was drained from his face so that it seemed as flat and wooden as the door to his most secret room. "It seems that the two creatures I love the most have conspired to betray me."

He grabbed a fistful of his wife's hair, and the ring of keys fell to the cold stone floor.

"I said you would pay dearly if you disobeyed me," he said evenly, almost lovingly. "Prepare to pay with your life."

"Master Bluebeard!" the fairy called out, but he ignored her.

He jerked his arm back so that his wife fell on the floor.

"Husband, please! I beg of you!" The woman stared at him blankly for a few moments, then suddenly folded her hands together. "Give me time to say my prayers and prepare for my death."

"Master Bluebeard," the fairy called out louder. "My love for

thee is as blue..."

Bluebeard paused, laying a tender hand on his wife's head. He grazed his fingertips along the side of her face as if in anticipation of making love to her. "Very well. I shall grant you the rest of the hour." He let his hand drop from her face. "I must find my knife and sharpen it in the meantime."

As the woman ran up the stairs of the castle to the highest floor, Bluebeard stalked to a workroom to retrieve his knife.

The fairy, still weeping tears of blood, lay with the other keys on the cold stone floor.

BROTHERS!" THE WOMAN called from a window facing the direction of the forest where she had lived. "Come to my aid!"

Unbeknownst to Bluebeard, this was what she had whispered to her brothers on the day she left her home: "If you ever hear my voice calling you, leave whatever you are doing at once and rush to my side."

In the forest, her youngest brother heard his sister's voice on the wind. He called to the others, and they rode from the forest so quickly that the travelers they passed thought they must surely have been chased by demons.

"Have you finished your prayers?" Bluebeard called up from below.

"Not yet, my husband," the woman replied, searching for any signs of her brothers. She leaned out the window and called again.

Several minutes later, she heard the grating sound of a knife being sharpened on a stone threshold.

"Have you finished your prayers yet?" Bluebeard called, once the grating sound had stopped.

"Not yet, my husband," the woman called louder, seeing nothing in the distance but an approaching storm.

Bluebeard threw open the door, with his gleaming knife in hand, and grabbed her by the hair again. "I say that you *are* ready to die," he said. Yanking on her hair, he led her down to his secret room and opened its door so that the blood flowed from the room once more. As he raised his knife, the woman's brothers ran down the passageway and pulled their sister away.

In the moment that Bluebeard met the gaze of his wife's three brothers, something in his sea-green eyes collapsed.

The fairy, still tossed aside on the floor, recognized what happened in his eyes from having lived in the forest.

It was the look of the predator who realizes it has become the prey and, in a moment's decision, surrenders.

"Master Bluebeard!" the fairy called out frantically. She struggled but could not move beyond the surface of the gold key.

She tried to reach out to him but could not.

As the three brothers pulled Bluebeard down the passageway, he looked back at the fairy and extended his fingertips toward her.

The gold key shuddered, and the fairy cried out in surprise.

The surface against her body became brittle, and as the key shuddered, that surface finally cracked.

The fairy pressed against the cracked surface until it broke apart, and she suddenly found herself . . .

Free.

The fairy spiraled through the air, her wings stiff and aching from having been pinned at her sides for so long.

High in the castle above, she heard the cries of men.

The fairy flew down the passageway and up the stairway and followed the cries outside to a high terrace.

She saw the brothers raise their swords.

She still had time to use her own freed magic to halt their blows.

The fairy remembered the many women she had seen die by Bluebeard's hand, all of the bodies and skeletons hanging on the walls in the cellar room. All of the women she had misled because of her love for the man who killed them.

The fairy hovered and looked away as the brothers hacked Bluebeard apart with their swords.

"Enough!" the woman called out from the edge of the terrace, where she looked out toward the forest.

Her brothers paused, staring at each other in confusion.

"Enough," she said again, turning around. She looked at her brothers, not at the work they had made of her husband. "He deserves a decent burial."

"No," said her youngest brother, taking her by the hand. "Leave him for the carrion."

The woman squeezed her brother's hand and let all three of them lead her away.

The fairy looked back at Bluebeard.

Although his body had been hacked to bits and his blood ran across the flagstones of the terrace, his eyes opened and looked at her longingly.

"Little key, golden key," his voice rasped. "Speak aloud of your love for me."

Her heart racing, the fairy hovered closer to Bluebeard's severed head. Frightened, she realized his magic was still strong.

From habit, she said, "Master Bluebeard, my love for thee is as blue as the sky . . ."

His hand, nearby, stretched its fingers toward her, and she felt the same flow that had cracked the key open and set her free.

The fairy stopped and dropped closer, looking deeply into his sea-green eyes. "Thou hast not lost thy magic...dost that mean it never left thee?"

"I was afraid," Bluebeard said, still gazing at her, "that if I let you out of the key, I would love you the way I loved all of my wives. It would have been too easy to love you in that way." His eyes closed, and he seemed to have to struggle to open them again. "It was more difficult to leave you inside the key." He hesitated. "But a deeper love I have never known."

His eyes closed again. With one, final breath, he said, "And now it is you who have set me free."

The fairy hovered closer and briefly touched his face.

Already, his skin was cold. The magic had finally ended.

The fairy flew up toward the sky, rising through a flock of black crows as they descended toward his body.

The storm had arrived, and thunder rumbled above.

"I have loved no one else," the fairy said. "As I love thee."

As she rose, her tears of blood turned to water, falling down upon Bluebeard's body like the first rain of spring. □

The fairy remembered the many women she had seen die by Bluebeard's hand. All of the women she had misled because of her love for the man who killed them. She hovered and looked away as the brothers hacked Bluebeard apart with their swords.

MICHAEL WHELAN





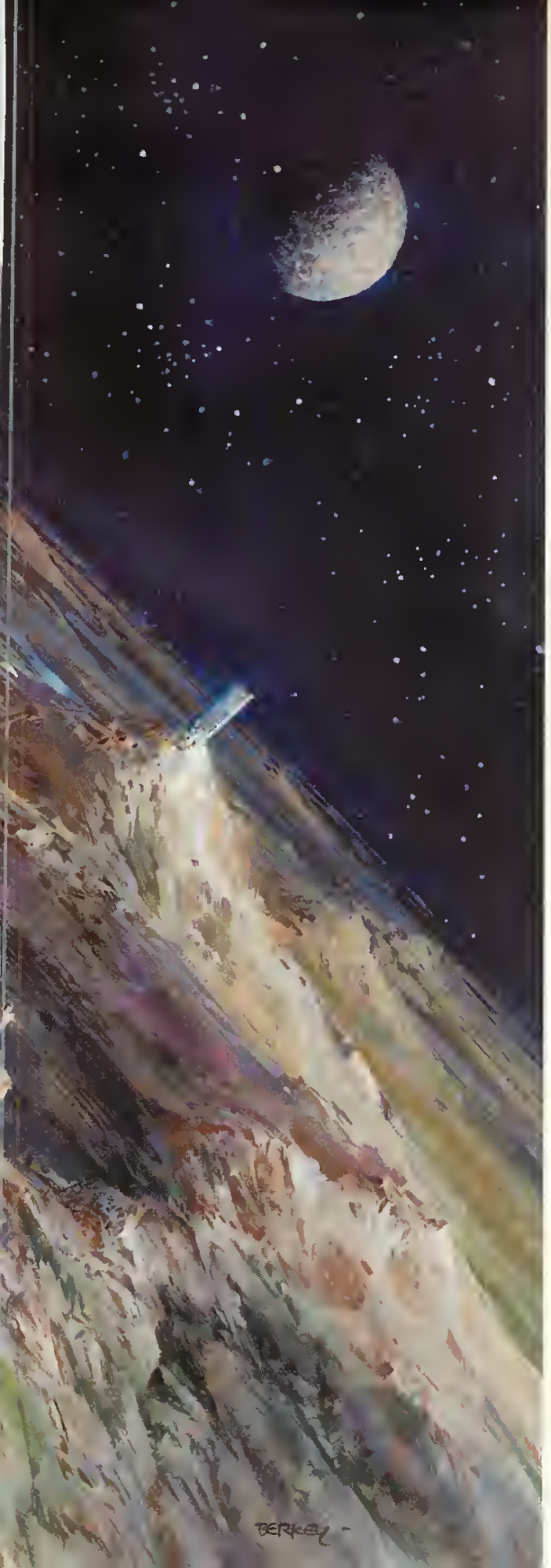
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SPECTRA

Bantam



Bharis, the mother world, was dying. And when his entire race sought to abandon the planet they had destroyed, only Mas Wathengria stood against them.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE HILL

BY DAVID BRIN

Illustration by John Berkey

DESERTS GROW.

"The sky glowers with deadly rays and the seas grow poisonous.

"Today I have come to tell you of our decision. You will get your way. Our people have no choice but to depart with the rest of you. To flee this unhappy, cursed world."

Head bowed, calloused hands clasped before him, Mas Wathengria spoke from the High Council's circle of deliberation, his voice heavy with age and defeat.

"North Glacier Clan submits to majority will," he concluded. "We will join the exodus."

The other members of the Council shared looks of astonishment, having grown accustomed to decades

of righteous northern stubbornness. At last, Keliangeli, the Grand Das of Farfields Clan, thumped the stone floor with her staff, exclaiming:

"We are united, then! All can join now, without bitterness or anguish over leaving kinfolk behind."

Wathengria answered with an acquiescent drooping of his earfringes. "No clan or colony will stay on Bharis, Das Keliangeli," he agreed. "My people will participate in the abandonment of our mother world, but only because it is too late to turn back."

The stooped, gray fringed Das appeared not to hear him, so excited was she. "With the resources of North Glacier no longer wasted, we can push the schedule forward two years and leave before another famine comes!"

Mas Wathengria nodded gravely. It would be rude, having submitted, to voice recriminations. Anyway, he was too tired. Keliangeli called it "waste" to set aside some of the last arable land on Bharis to spare it the kind of intense overuse that had ruined most of a once-beautiful planet. Starvation and pestilence had twisted judgment and reason. The Das and her followers were desperate enough to try anything, even to use up what was left of this world in order to flee toward a distant star. North Glacier, with its fresh water and abundant ores, had long held out. But the siren song of a robot, circling a faraway globe, now beckoned with lush green hints of fecundity. Wathengria had lately begun to sense his leadership slipping away. As shipbuilding became a planet-wide mania, despite further damage brought on by the reckless pace, even his own clan's blessed isolation offered no protection.

"My ecologists tell me that once the ships are built and the exodus prepared, little more than seven-hundredths of the land on Bharis will remain suitable for supporting a decent standard of life. You, all of you, have thrown our lives like dice into the wind. They tumble even now, up in the sky." He pointed to the fleet, which glittered like gems in early evening, crossing the heavens much more swiftly than the stars. "North Glacier cannot but join the cast."

"We are overjoyed to have you with us, Mas Wathengria," the Bas of Sheltered Oasis cried out, oblivious to Wathengria's irony.

"Oh, yes!" Das Keliangeli added. "On our new home, you will help teach us how to keep and preserve it against the sorts of mischief our ancestors unleashed on Bharis. You will be our conscience."

Wathengria suppressed a hot response. True, their ancient forebears had done the worst harm, with their wars, noxious pollution and mismanagement. But today's folk were multiplying the damage, even as they sought to flee. "My specialists will accompany you to the new world. Perhaps you will learn from them, although I doubt it. As for myself, I plan to stay and take the Lesser Death, in stasis within the hall of my progenitors. One of our race should remain to explain this wasteland, should the ancient gods of myth ever return to look in dismay upon poor, ruined Bharis."

The Mas coursed his eyes around the circle. On a few faces, he noted signs of shame. But within moments of turning and departing the hall, he heard their voices rise again behind him, the moment forgotten amid new, excited plans.

No one even protested my personal decision to stay, he thought. *Probably they're all relieved to hear the last of my carping. My caustic criticism.*

From his transport, Mas Wathengria looked down on the Valley of Lansenil. The Council Chambers stood next to one of the few remaining sites of untarnished beauty on Bharis. If they had chosen a more desolate and representative place, Mas Wathengria might have been more optimistic for his race.

Forested slopes gave way to the paler shades of crops and pocket gardens, and then the harbor spires of Sea Haven, one of three remaining cities. Haven was not yet a desert of wind-blown dust. Still, Mas Wathengria tried not to look closely as his machine passed over cracked marble monuments, stained by ancient pollution and more recent, inexorable decay. Squinting past the fuming shipworks, he peered instead with his mind's inner eye toward the better days of his youth. Longingly, he filled his mind with remembered beauty to take with him to an icy tomb.

One compensation. The animals and plants that remain will have peace at last. We "thinking creatures" will no longer be such a menace.

Too late, alas. Much, much too late.

SOUNDS OF CELEBRATION CONTINUED EVEN AFTER THE airlock sealed, cutting off the noise of continuing revelry aboard the mothership. The crew on Ras Gafengria's exploration craft was on duty and free of intoxicants, but that did not make them sober. They went grinning to their tasks, babbling excitedly, drunk on the tincture of hope.

It was tempting to give in to the contagious happiness. Who wouldn't feel joy at the prospect of landing on a beautiful world after half an aeon of cold sleep! Orbital surveys had already confirmed what the earlier robot probes promised. More than twice as much of this planet's surface area supported life as compared to tired old Bharis. Green regions ran like thick veins across every continent. As for the oceans—no one living had ever seen so much good water. The cartographer kept muttering happily, over and over that seas covered nearly a third of the globe!

Ras Gafengria wanted to share the others' covetous triumph. She could appreciate the wonder of this place. After all, here was an entire ecosystem to study... and perhaps take better care of, if she and others like her had their way.

But the message, she thought. *It's hard to take pleasure in any of this, after seeing my father's message.*

The pilots banked the boat into an aerodynamic braking dive to save fuel. Soon they were passing high over an ocean. Instruments detected planktonic life, something they could not have done an equal distance above old Bharis. Amazing. Yet, Gafengria's thoughts kept pulling back to the image in the mothership's viewing tank—an image of Mas Wathengria, the old man's face almost unchanged from when she had seen it last, impassively watching his people march into the ships. Leaving him behind. Alone.

The Council had not wanted anything to distract from the joy of a million and a half newly awakened exiles. So the leaders only invited a few to come see the strange message that had caught up with their fleet while passengers and crew slept. Patient computers had stored the transmission until arrival, when the officers and councilors wakened to view it.

The first thing Gafengria had noticed was the date—five hundred and forty turns after Departure! So, the old man's stasis unit had held, even without anyone around to perform routine maintenance.

She had expected words, but what happened next was far more startling. Her father's wrinkled sardonic visage shrank as he stepped back from the camera, and into the holo tank next to him appeared the image of an alien creature!

The figure was tall, bipedal and slender, with dark cranial filaments that lay motionless atop its scalp. The narrow, fleshy face was inset with two small but penetrating eyes, above and on both sides of a fleshy, protruding nose.

Mas Wathengria remained silent for a long interval, as if knowing the effect this scene would have on those who would later view it. Only when the shock had abated slightly did his speech begin.

"My dear, departed people," the Mas had said. *"I hope your new world is everything you prayed for. If, indeed, you've learned a lesson, perhaps you will take better care of it than you did our poor, beloved Bharis. You'll notice, though, I haven't held my breath!"*

The message went on. *"By the time you see this, another several hundred years will have passed. Nevertheless, I'm giving in to a little hastiness, rushing to transmit so you can be introduced to Bharis' new tenants.*

"They're really very nice people. The Mhenn, as they're called, seem to adore our tired old world! They've settled into Sea Haven now, and they want you to know..."

The chief pilot interrupted Gafengria's recollection. "We're approaching the coast now, noble Ras," he said. A collective sigh filled the cabin as the shoreline neared. Scattered vegetation grew

upon the dun slopes, left and right as far as the eye could see, even from this great height. None of the people had ever encountered such a sight.

"Over there!" One of the pilots pointed to the eastern horizon. "One of the anomaly clusters! Shall we fly closer?"

Gafengria assented and they adjusted course toward an elevated clump of brown and tan shapes, shinier than the surrounding dunes. From space, the regular, geometric features had caused some to speculate that they might be cities. The prospect of inhabitants with prior claims to this planet disturbed the Council... though such a rich world surely had room enough for two races.

The youngest pilot gasped. "They *are* habitations!"

The chief pilot magnified the screen. "Perhaps, once. But they look long abandoned."

The remaining constructions soon left no doubt this had been a great city, indeed. Giant, spidery bridges and archways still connected many of the concave structures, whose blank, oval windows stared empty, like the eye sockets in a skull.

The ship cautiously slowed, maintaining some distance from the rounded stone shapes. The remaining constructions soon left no doubt that this had indeed been a great city. Giant, spidery bridges and archways still connected many of the concave structures, whose blank, oval windows stared empty, like the eye sockets in a skull. The alienness of the architecture was almost as eerie as was the desolate loneliness of total abandonment.

The younger pilot pointed again, this time to a broad, flattened area not far away. "Firing pits," he pronounced. "A launching field."

"Don't jump to conclusions. We can't be..." The senior pilot abruptly stopped and stared. The cartographer gasped. As they topped a gentle rise, an immense cube of shining metal came into view, glittering under the slanting sunshine. Gafengria covered her eyes, wishing the giant thing would go away. She had a premonition about it, which caused her fringes to shrink down to their roots. It did not feel good.

"The Council calls," their comm operator said. "Command wants us to approach the artifact. Shipboard image enhancement indicates *writing* along the sides, inscribed in binary code!"

In hushed awe, the pilots brought the boat nearer. Ras Gafengria sank back in her seat, while the comm operator tuned to the frequency of the linguists, onboard the mothership. Those experts babbled urgently about ciphers and contexts and translation possibilities. About analogies and similarities....

"It's all terribly ironic," Gathengria recalled her father pronouncing across the light years. *"These Mhenn are also refugees! They, too, fled a world that could barely support them. They didn't use robot probes to search for a new planet. Their method appears to have been more direct, though I can't say I really understand it well enough to explain it.*

"Anyway, here they are. They awakened me, and I told them where you'd all gone. They're very much like us, you know." His smile had been bitter. *"They may look strange, but it's uncanny how much like us they truly are."*

HOLOGRAMS FROM THE CUBIC ARTIFACT FILLED the tank in front of Ras Gafengria. It was a full body portrait of an alien being, a roundish shape coated with tentacles. To her surprise and relief, those who had left this monolith weren't at all similar in appearance to the "Mhenn" shown in her father's message.

Thank the gods, Ras sighed. *That* irony would have been too much to bear—that one species should deplete its home world in order to fly to a refuge that had been depleted by another race in *its* own desperate effort to flee to the first....

As a matter of fact, that tragedy was logically impossible. For one thing, the Mhenn had come from a direction opposite to the one the people had fled toward. And anyway, her father had said the Mhenn were *pleased* with their new world. In fact, the poor creatures had seemed pathetically ecstatic, calling their new home a "paradise." How devastated their own planet must have been, then, to think so highly of tired old Bharis!

RAS NOTICED THAT THE OTHERS ON THE BOAT HAD STOPPED TALKING. "What —?" she began. The cartographer turned and whispered. "The translation, noble Ras! They've translated the inscription!"

Blinking, she saw that the alien figure in the holo tank was moving! Over the hum of the hovering engines, a tinny voice accompanied the movements, soft and lilting. In text below the figure flowed the mothership's translation, in the language of Bharis.

"... So we were forced to decide...to remain and face continued famine, or to take a desperate gamble, squandering our last resources to fling our race of heroes across the stars.... The (undefined term) choice was obvious to all but a few (undefined term).... By the time the necessary (undefined term) transmitters were completed, our world was humbled... ruined... less than a quarter of her land arable...dead in so many..."

"Less than a *quarter?*" The voice of the assistant ecologist cracked. "They call that ruined? The message can't be correctly translated!"

But Ras Gafengria sighed, seeing it all in utter clarity. So. They had been spared the irony that was superficially most cruel, only so they might have nightmares over a far more subtle joke the Universe had played on them. Or that they had all played on the Universe.

She closed her eyes and wished the onetime denizens of this world good luck in their quest. *May they find their bountiful new home. Though to satisfy them, it need be so rich as to stagger my imagination. They don't deserve success, of course, but neither did we... nor the Mhenn, presumably.*

In her mind she envisioned a chain of intelligent but short-sighted races, each getting more mercy than it merited, joyful at inheriting the leavings of the one ahead of it in line. Each conditioned to see its new, leftover wasteland as a heaven.

She thought of Wathengria's wry words and wished he had not taught her so well the burdensome gift of honesty.

"The Mhenn had a terrible time," the Mas had said. *"But they kept faith and knew they would find a world as nice as Bharis, someday. Amongst them, there is a saying almost as old as their race. When times were hard, they repeated it to one another for encouragement. For the courage to move on. Loosely translated, it goes something like this—*

"'Over the mountain, the plant life will be a more pleasant shade of green.'

"Now I must end this message and begin trying to teach the new tenants of Bharis how to take care of her. Perhaps this time I will have better luck.

"May fate bless you, my wayward children. As little as you deserve it, may you also find the grass greener and the waters sweeter... on the other side of the hill." □

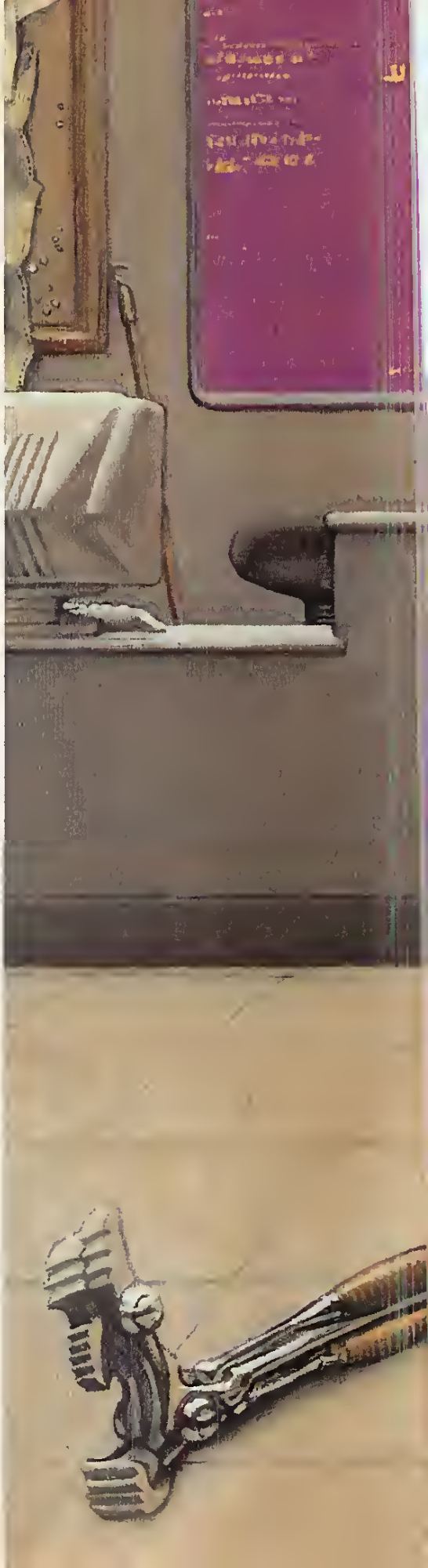
This November, at last, book publication of Harlan Ellison's legendary unproduced screenplay for Asimov's *I, Robot*—the greatest SF movie *never* made. Our exclusive excerpts from Ellison's hot introduction.

ME 'N' ISAAC AT THE MOVIES

A Brief Memoir Of Citizen Calvin

BY HARLAN ELLISON

Illustrations by Mark Zug



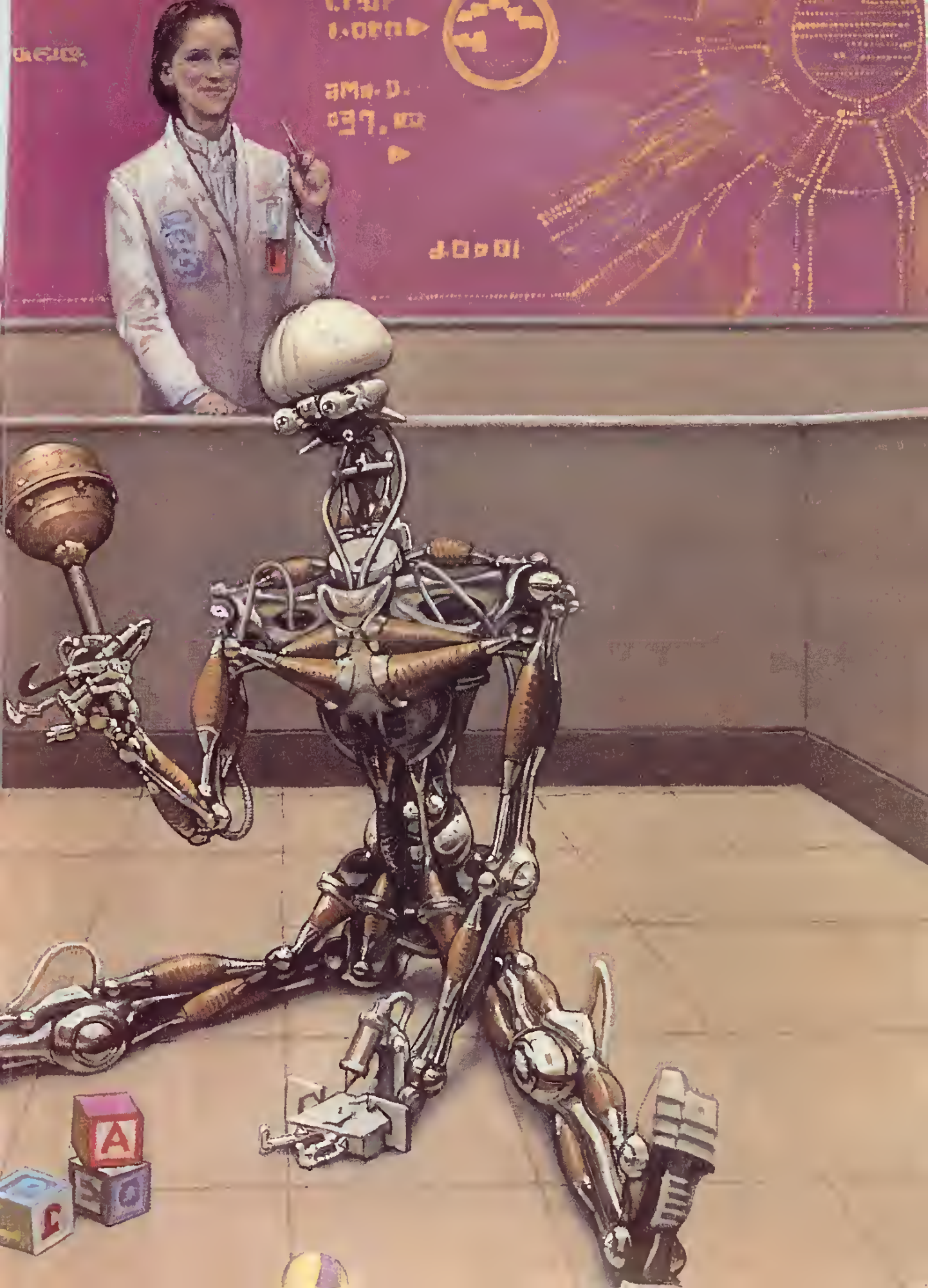
MY HEART BLEEDS LIKE A ROCK WHEN I HAVE the dream. I always cry; or if I'm in public, I pretend it's an allergy that's making me get all choked up. This dream...I never have it at night, asleep. It *always* comes to me when I'm off-guard, when I'm awake but my mind is elsewhere. A daydream, a looking-off-through-the-air... unmanned, disarmed, fit to be bushwhacked.

In the daydream, the daymare, Isaac and I are in a movie theater. We're sitting side-by-side, watching a movie. *This* movie, the screenplay it took a year of my creative life to write; the movie that Isaac liked so much. Isaac and I, we're sitting there watching *I, Robot.*

It's a *terrible* daydream, and I come out of it shaking my head, trying to get the pictures out of the darkness where I play them over and over in the Cinerama dome of my memory. Isaac really liked this screenplay a lot, and Warner Bros. studios never made the motion picture, and now Isaac is dead and will never see it, and I keep having this awful, damned daydream in which we sit together enjoying what might have been. And it doesn't matter if I have the daydream a hundred times, I cannot keep myself from crying when I wrench out of that theater of memory. Like Isaac's dear Janet, and Robyn, and Stan, and all the rest of us who won't see him again, it is impossible for me to convey the pain that seems somehow never to go away completely; a pain that we willingly endure because it serves to bring him back at memory's behest; in my case, there in the movie theater.

After several first draft rewrites, I sent the final to Isaac early in August of 1978. He wrote me on the 18th, "I picked up the completed manuscript a little after 10 P.M. last night just to glance through it and see what changes you had made.

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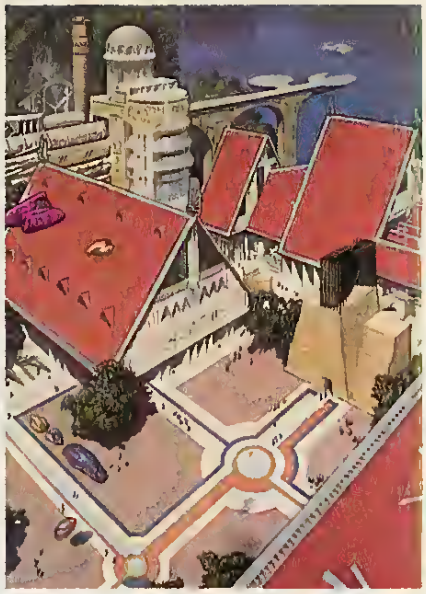


For two years Ellison and the I, ROBOT *publishers searched for the absolutely perfect artist to meld with the screenplay. A dozen of the biggest fantasy and comic art names were considered and reluctantly spiked. Then, one day, out of the blue, came a portfolio from a self-taught, unpublished young artist in Pittsburgh. He had been earning his living as a lathe operator in a machine shop. His cover letter asked, "Am I good enough to have a career in art? Can you find some work for me?" It was a joke of synchronicity by the universe: Mark Zug had trained himself in the tradition of the Brandywine School—Howard Pyle, the Wyeths—and Maxfield Parrish, the great Leyendecker. Find him some work? How about the dream project of all time, a marriage of words and art made in Heaven.*

I began reading word for word and, with bedtime at 11, I was done at 12:30 A.M. with Janet reasoning with me that I need my sleep.

"It's terrific, Harlan. I asked you in my letter of 9 March to make it 'the first really adult, complex, worthwhile science fiction movie ever made' and you've done it. You've put your own frame around four of my stories, kept the stories mine in essence and in much detail, made the frame your very own (with a skill and imagination I could never even dream of matching) and yet kept it in the spirit of *I, Robot* also. In particular, you kept Susan Calvin *my* Susan Calvin and that is wonderful."

I quote from that letter—a letter that went on much longer and enthused even more than what I've set down here—even the parts that are embarrassingly self-serving—because it is imperative to me that anyone who picks up the illustrated screenplay understands that this is not one of those work-for-hire afterthought books that capitalizes on Isaac's name, or the work he did that made his reputation. This is no succubus expansion of a short story, or twiddle that springboards from



a "treatment" Isaac may have sold to some merchandiser. It is a novel-for-the-screen that was written by me, with Isaac's seed-quartet of stories and the living shadow of Susan Calvin as sun and rain that brought forth an entirely different creative work. I quote Isaac's affection for that new work, because he gave me what I needed to do the job, and he loved me enough to trust me and let me go my way; and I gave him something he admired in return for that love and trust. And I need the reader to know this is truly the end-result of a friendship that lasted more than forty years.



ISAAC LEFT AT 2:30 A.M. NEW York time on Monday, April 6th, 1992. I'd been working on this book, with Mark Zug and Byron Preiss and my editor Howard Zimmerman, for almost a year at that time. And though Isaac had seen the screenplay's initial publication in the monthly magazine that bears his name—and had beamed like a proud poppa when he was told that not only had the screenplay won "by popular acclaim" a 1987 Reader's Award from *Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, but that it was a finalist on the ballot for the 1988 Hugo Award—he never got to admire the work of young Mark Zug, never got to see how Mark has given eyes to my scenarist's artifice, never got to see this film-novel. (Wryly, teeth grinding with the desire to insert a railroad spike at least an inch deep into the left eyeball of such critic-*manqué* as the woefully bitter, jealous, and untalented Gregory Feeley or Sheldon Teitelbaum, who regularly *kvetch* that I am no-price because I don't write novels, I gleefully point out that I have written at least *twenty*





novels: in the form of motion pictures. *I, Robot* is a 90,000 word novel, but the members of the Baby Weasel Brigade, who create and alter the rules to fit their mendacious purposes, cannot countenance such a concept. One can only despair at how they would discount Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* or William Burroughs' *The Ticket That Exploded* for daring to present themselves in any experimental garb other than the usual straitjacket of "the Novel.")

Yet I can say that I spent an entire year at the movies with Isaac Asimov (and never once did I have to share the popcorn).

It broke both our hearts that the film never got made, but that was neither Isaac's nor my fault; it was the fault of the monumentally inept and wasteful System that obtains in Hollywood. (I've been here since 1962, and I've written about the System at length elsewhere, as have thousands of other bludgeoned writers.)

It remains, sadly, an unproduced epic.

It broke our hearts.

Because this screenplay is the story of Susan Calvin. I wrote it with Joanne Woodward in mind as Susan. George C. Scott as Reverand Soldash; Keenan Wynn and Ernie Borgnine as Donovan and Powell; Martin Sheen as Robert Bratenahl. You can picture them as you read the Warner Aspect edition, with its inordinately beautiful Mark Zug paintings. (Or substitute your 1990's star alternatives, but if you suggest Madonna or Garth Brooks, I will have to hurt you.)

WE SUFFER, THESE days, in Hollywood, from a great many writers whose background is not in literature, but in television upbringing. They were raised on *I Love Lucy.* When some of these people go into theatrical features, they use as templates the shallow devices of the sitcom. Spielberg and Lucas make films that are *hommage* to Saturday morning serials, pop goods that are amusing for children but certainly cannot be considered great art. When I set out to interpret Isaac's stories, when I sat down to beat this problem of integrating only-vaguely-linked stories written over a long period, I knew that the key was not the robots...it was the human story of Susan Calvin. And for my model I decided to go to High Art. *I, Robot* is framed as a homage to *Citizen Kane,* arguably the finest motion picture ever made. It was my hope that by treating Isaac's work in the most serious way from the start, I would produce not only an adult film that would make my liaison with Isaac something that would live forever, but would satisfy the disparate needs of the studio, the producers, my own creative desires, and Isaac's primacy of interest in the material. And would respond not to the *reality* of those fifty-year-old stories, but to the affectionate recollections of readers.

This is the movie Isaac loved. I'll never really sit beside him to see it, except in that troubling daydream; but if it gets made, well, then a piece of Isaac will live on. The piece he created called Susan Calvin.

The life of Citizen Calvin. The record of a wonderful year of hard work I spent at the movies with my friend Isaac Asimov, who first dreamed of metal men and a remarkable woman. This one's for you, pal. □



From the opening sequence at the gravesite of Stephen Byerley, First President of the Galactic Federation, on Aldebaran-C XII, to the heart of the Amazon jungle and the lost city of Xingú Xavante and the secret in its depths, to the three-mile-deep cryonic crypts sunk beneath Sigma Draconis 5, this film and Mark Zug's art are the realization of every mental image treasured by Asimov's fans and aficionados of Ellison's special storytelling.

A brief excerpt from the introduction to I, ROBOT: THE ILLUSTRATED SCREENPLAY *by Harlan Ellison, inspired by Isaac Asimov's story-cycle. To be published in November by Warner Aspect, and Byron Preiss Visual Publications, Inc. Illustrated with 32 oil paintings by Mark Zug.*

By Connie Hirsch

Amidst endless superheroes, *Illegal Alien* is as ambitious as the best SF.



The creators of Illegal Alien *blow a hole in SF clichés. Cover art by Teddy Khristianson.*

"THE CHAMELEON EMPLOYS ONE OF THE GREAT tricks of concealment," says one of the characters in *Illegal Alien* (Kitchen Sink, eighty pages, $9.95). "Not with its colour changes, but with its stillness and silence."

Stillness and silence might seem odd subjects for a graphic novel, particularly one featuring aliens, UFOs, the Mob, Russian moles, mods, rockers, and an Italian-English family in the year 1963. Yet, these descriptives fit the diffident storytelling, the simultaneous simplicity and confidence of the artwork, and the gentleness of the story. This book deserves attention for its polite and heartfelt ways.

I confess I got hooked on this graphic novel by, of all things, a full-page picture of a chameleon. I was riffling through the pages, trying to get a taste of what this graphic novel was going to be like before I actually *read* it, when the book happened to fall open onto a simply rendered full-page picture of a chameleon, the characters' faces nearly indistinct as seen through the glass behind it. That's just different enough of an image that I had to stop and ask, "What's going on here?"

Writer James Robinson and artist Phil Elliott are new to me: Robinson has worked on *Grendel Tales* and DC's *The Golden Age*, and Elliott on something called *Bluebeard*. Beyond that I don't know a thing about them, except this: if this is any sample, we're likely to see interesting things from them in the future.

Yes, the chameleon pictured at approximately the two-thirds point of the book intrigued me. I flipped back to the opening pages, where a UFO has been shot down by jets and a spacesuited figure staggers forth from the wreck. That's familiar material, all right, as B-movie an opening as an SF fan could want, not unpromising but not yet anything special. But then I flipped forward a few pages and came upon another full-page splash—two women talking in a crowded launderette. How odd. How are we going to get, dramatically, from that first scene to this one? And then to the chameleon? Points A, B and C as I've described them didn't seem to be connectable on any logical graph I could imagine. There was nothing to do but start reading the book....

Illegal Alien has eighty black and white pages, an unpopular format for a graphic novel in these days of Baxter paper, fully painted interiors, foil embossing and special promotional trading cards. So right there it's bucking the tide. Furthermore, the artwork seems deliberately primitive and the storytelling somewhat oblique and, dare I say it, "still."

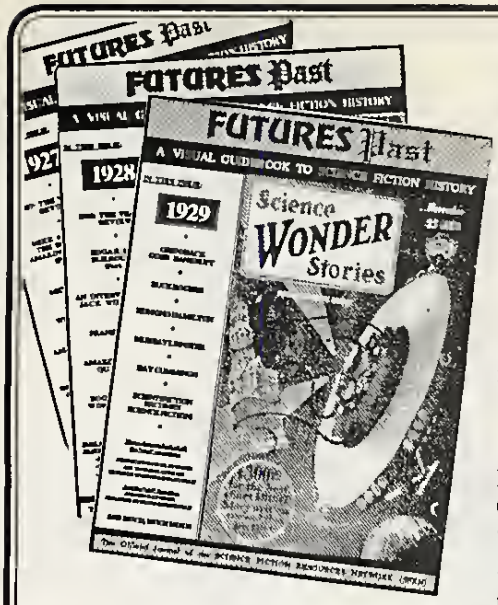
The outline of the story sounds like an odd mixture of *The Hidden* and the old television show *My Favorite Martian*. An alien—we don't know his "real" name, and there isn't any indication that his people even use them anyway—is shot down over Nevada in early 1963 by the ever-welcoming American government. With his life-sustaining containment suit damaged, his only hope is to transfer his essence to a temporary container. Agents question him as they would a possible Russian defector, but when they remove his suit, only a vapor escapes from it—a vapor one of the agents suspects is somehow alive.

Some undisclosed amount of time later, our alien takes over the recently deceased body of a Mafia operator named Guido Palmano, rubbed out on his way overseas to coordinate with English organized crime (the infamous Kray brothers, I believe we are supposed to infer). Of course, the newly reborn "Guido" has little interest in this mission. In his possession are an airplane ticket and a letter from his cousin Tony, inviting him to stay while he's over there. So "Guido" moves in with his Italian-English cousin Tony Bardinelli and family, influencing their lives for the better and setting himself up as an "inventor" to benefit his adopted species.

Of course, the past associates of mobster Guido aren't pleased with a henchman gone South. Not to mention the Mafia soldier who killed Guido once already. (Will he have to rub him out all over again?) Nor are the federal agents who were grooming Guido Palmano as an informant pleased, and neither are the Russian spies within the British government who would like to turn this eccentric inventor over to their masters. And on top of this, the alien's own race is going to attempt a rescue mission. Whatever situations will confront "Guido Palmano," a lack of options is not going to be a problem.

A reader of a graphic novel first reacts to the artwork.


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Elliott's art is simplistic, even primitive. You'll never find yourself falling into these pages, but the necessary, observed detail—from the impressionistic penguin pool at the zoo to a sudden London skyline—is present. Each and every scene is set in a very specific place: the zoo, the Bardinelli living room, a police station, "Guido's" laboratory. Behind the sketchy surface of the art lies a sure authenticity: Britain, 1963.

The storytelling is very cinematic. We sometimes move quickly from scene to scene, spending only one panel in each place and time; or we spend an entire page on momentary changes in expression as a character comes to understand the true nature of his "relative."

This odd timing and occasional lack of focus may lose Robinson and Elliott some readers, I fear. But when they settle down into a sequence—for instance, the scene at the laundromat that details the family relationships of the cousins and their reaction to their strange "relative" through the words of Marie, Tony's wife—the narrative comes into its quirky own. The art often relies on full-page splashes. In action-oriented stories, a splash is used to show off art style and emphasize the action. The art in *Illegal Alien* is somewhat anti-stylish, and the splashes are almost always static: out of seventeen illustrations (in an eighty-page book) perhaps two depict real action—UFOs flying. We're more likely to see the Bardinelli family sitting down to dinner, a bureauerat sitting at his document-cluttered desk, pondering his next move, Tony's ice cream truck with customers queued up. They are, in a sense, quiet snapshots; they often occur in the middle of scenes instead of serving as flashy starts or lingering ends to those story building blocks.

Alas, the story often drifts rather than building to by-the-numbers climaxes. But "Guido" himself is a gentle soul, a drifting kind of character, sometimes passive and somewhat passionless. He is from a species, after all, that has never possessed the physical existence he enjoys now, and the story is partially about his coming to terms with this change.

I suppose it can be said that Robinson and Elliott have been too ambitious in this story: they set out to squeeze into eighty pages what could have been presented as a miniseries. But I suspect they would have been less successful forced into a framework of twenty-four pages and a "Continued next month!" blurb at the end of every chapter: they're positively not into climaxes and cliffhangers to intrigue the reader into committing another purchase same time next month. It is better that they have a complete story all in one place, with no artificially imposed starts and stops.

Dramatically, by far the most important relationship is the one "Guido" develops with his putative second cousin Dino, Tony's son. He is a young man on the fringes of the Mod movement (1963 was one of the glory

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years of the Beatles and the Stones and rioting in the streets over style), looking for something beyond his small world to believe in—and the mentor/protégé relationship that "Guido" cultivates with him turns his life around. It is to him that "Guido" turns at the last to explain it all and pass on his message.

It is no mistake that *Illegal Alien* ends with a quiet image of Dino looking through a telescope at the Royal Observatory on his way to the hopes and dreams opened to him by Guido. This book tries something rarely attempted by the graphic literature: to cultivate a feeling of stillness and silence, a feeling of cosmic peace and wisdom. In this market of fun, flashy violence and silly, splashy art, it is gratifying to find this quirky, affectionate book hiding in plain sight, rather like a chameleon on a branch.

Recent & Recommended

•If you can recall where you were on November 22, 1963, you're sure to enjoy the post-modern noir farce that is *The New Frontier* (NBM Publishing, trade paperback, 112 pages, $12.95). But even if those tumultuous days are only history to you, the vision of the alternate future that Michael Cherkas and John Sabljic have created here is sure to entertain as it pokes fun of pop icons and the way celebrity rules the airwaves, and sometimes the world itself. Cherkas has had his own fifteen minutes of fame before, with *The Silent Invasion* and *Suburban Nightmares*, but this newest collaborative effort seems sure to lengthen his stay beneath the spotlight. *The New Frontier* gives us a world where instead of a Kennedy assassination and the seemingly endless killings that followed, the '60s were filled with a World Series No-Hitter pitched by Fidel Castro, the H-Bombing of North Korea, the assassination of Bert Parks...and the murder of Marilyn Monroe-esque film star Rubi Fields, whose mysterious death traumatizes the nation and changes the world. Conspiracy theorists will love this book, made up of equal parts satire and suspense.

•Imagine Mike Hammer on a bad drug trip and you'll get some idea of the bizarre creation that is *Johnny Dynamite* (Dark Horse, $2.95), a comic book which manages to be a tribute to both '50s detectives and bad sci-fi and horror flicks at the same time. The four-issue miniseries was created by artist Terry Beatty and writer Max Allen Collins, best known for their series *Ms. Tree*. Their latest take on the detective genre is a twisted one. "It's Mickey Spillaine meets George Romero," says Beatty. The duo's love of B movies is evident, as they have their weary detective battle zombie thugs, and even the devil himself, turning horror, fantasy, and SF clichés on their heads. *Johnny Dynamite* bends genre with an eye-patched private eye ready to take on whatever a psychotronic universe is ready to throw at him. This private dick is sure to appeal to readers of mystery and SF alike. □

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by Chuck Rothman

Larry Niven's Ringworld novels spawn a fun and challenging computer sequel.

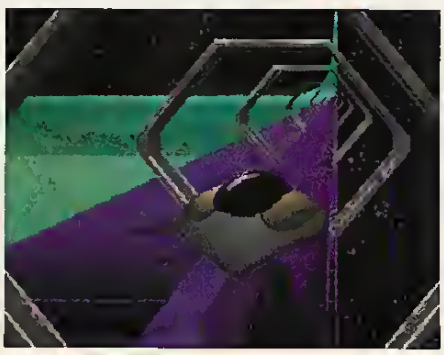


Playing Return to Ringworld *is like stepping inside Larry Niven's creative universe. Art by David Mattingly. BELOW: The graphics for Tsunami Media's game range from good to superb.*

In the late 1960s, Larry Niven created one of science fiction's most appealing universes: the Known Space series. Filled with fascinating aliens, strange worlds, and intriguing concepts, the stories and novels created a detailed and complex society, leading up to its best-known book, *Ringworld.*

Ringworld is one of modern science fiction's most attractive creations. The giant orbiting ring has held its appeal for over twenty years now. It is an enormous place where just about anything can be found. Scientifically almost-plausible (a few spoilsports later pointed out flaws in the concept, but who cares?), the world seemed ready-made for adventure.

So it was inevitable that someone would put the giant ring onto a compact disc for game playing. Tsunami Media and Time Warner Interactive have joined to publish *Return to Ringworld,* a new interactive CD-ROM game for MS-DOS computers.



This isn't Tsunami's first venture into Known Space. The game is a sequel to their earlier *Ringworld: Revenge of the Patriarch. Return to Ringworld* makes some reference to events in the previous game, but you don't have to know anything about the previous game (or, for that matter, about *Ringworld*—though why deny yourself the pleasure?).

Return to Ringworld shows the adventures of three fugitives—Quinn McQuarry, Miranda Rees, and Seeker of Vengeance (a Kzin, one of Niven's tigerlike aliens). At the start, the three have just finished averting an interstellar war, and, for their efforts, they have been marked wanted criminals. Their only course of action is to return to Ringworld to hide and to find a way to clear their names. As they search, they are chased by various enemies—the U.N.'s Amalgamated Regional Militia (ARM), the Kzin, and the inhabitants of Ringworld itself. The action leads them from their stolen spaceship, the *Lance of Truth,* to dozens of environments that make up Ringworld.

In structure, of course, this is your standard "quest" computer game. What makes this a step above is its use of CD-ROM technology. The game makes use of state-of-the-art sound and graphics, including a number of "cinematic sequences"—movies that play on your computer, complete with stereo sound.

How do the graphics look? They range from good to superb. The movies are first class computer animation, their only flaw a slight blurriness. On a good system, they are impressive. But the movies are just that—movies. You watch and listen but can't do anything else.

For most of the game, the graphics are much like those in other computer adventure games. It's good quality, but don't expect to see state-of-the-art images from start to finish. Motion is generally smooth, and the appropriate sound effects accompany each action. Thus, for example, you hear the door opening, or the elevator moving from floor to floor. The sound quality depends on your sound card but seems clear and crisp on a good system.

The game is, as Hollywood used to bill things, "100 percent All Talking." The characters speak aloud, their voices recorded by professional actors. It's not quite 100 percent natural—the voices seem a bit stilted at times, though that may be because the actors were told to speak slowly so that the player wouldn't miss important clues. You can display the words as they speak if you want (the system will run without a sound card this way). It was fun hearing some of the words spoken aloud; I didn't realize that there was a silent "k" in "Kzin."

All this, of course, requires a



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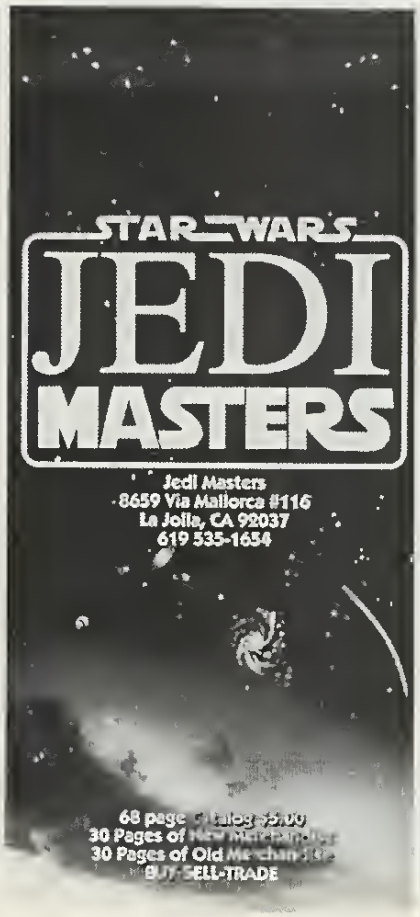
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powerful system and a lot of memory. Surprisingly, the game will not run under Windows. It uses conventional memory only—a lot of it. If you're running a complex configuration on your system, you may have to edit your AUTOEXEC.BAT and CONFIG.SYS settings to remove any excess TSRs. The bottom line: if the previous sentence is technobabble to you (and, for some systems, even if it isn't), one of the biggest challenges of *Return to Ringworld* just might be getting it up and running. I'm not sure how critical the upper limit is; on one system, the game seemed to run OK even though I was a bit short of what they needed, while on another, it took a great deal of effort to make sure I had enough memory.

Tsunami does offer help. There are suggestions in the documentation on how to deactivate programs that you don't need, and they offer a technical support number to give you assistance. It's not toll-free, but they are friendly and helpful and will call you back if the right person isn't available. Their main suggestion—to create a special startup disk for the game—works fine, though it strikes me as a clumsy way to do it.

That hurdle over, though, the game is quite a challenge. This is a puzzle game; intelligence is required, not good reflexes. It's advertised as being for the intermediate gamer, and they mean it. Nothing is easy; many times you think you've solved a problem just to discover there's something new to deal with first.

Not that the beginner can't enjoy things. *Return to Ringworld* isn't a race. You can take your time to learn the game, to explore, or to just enjoy the story spinning out. The characters don't even have to work on their adventure at all times. This may be the first adventure game in which characters can take a break and play a game within a game, a twenty-ninth century card game called Outpost Alpha.

Each screen shows you the current action, plus an inventory bar of items your character is carrying. Movement is mouse-based: you click on the screen to take action. A right mouse click brings up a menu to switch from one action to another; hot keys are available as a short cut. In certain scenes (such as the ship's elevator, for instance) the inventory bar isn't needed, so it's not displayed. And during the cinematic sequences, the mouse is unavailable while you watch them unfold.

The format is the familiar one of characters trying to complete the tasks necessary to achieve a goal. Your job is to avoid your enemies (and the dangers of Ringworld itself), while searching for a way to clear your names. All three main characters take part; you can choose to play any one of them and, as a special twist, you can switch from one to the other at any time. Often, only one character is best equipped to deal with the situation; you have to figure out which one. Other characters—major or minor—can

give suggestions, hints, or other important information, but only if you ask the right questions.

Conversations are preset (to match the sound, of course), but generally offer choices about what to say. You can't be sure what will help you out. Sometimes a simple, innocuous question will lead to important revelations; other times, what seems to be a good thing to ask only gets you a few curt words in reply.

I liked the way the characters have to work as a team. Quinn, Miranda, and Seeker all have different personalities and knowledge. One character's expertise can be the key to solving a problem, and you never know until you ask. Early on, I found myself stuck until I learned how the other characters could give me a hand.

The solutions seem both logical and fair; there is a reason behind every successful course of action. Still, the solutions are far from obvious and require multiple actions to fit things into place. In fact, it's quite an accomplishment merely to get to Ringworld in the first place. For those with a low level of frustration, Tsunami offers a 24-hour, 900-number hint line (80 cents a minute); a hint book is also available.

One nice advantage of using an existing universe like Known Space is that the game designers don't have to create everything from scratch. The events of the game are tied in with Niven's stories, giving it an exceptionally rich background. There are mysteries and hidden motives behind events and it's fun to discover the interconnections, even those that aren't strictly relevant to playing the game. You end up with the same sort of insights and revelations that make reading a good book so interesting. Even though a knowledge of Niven's books isn't required, it's useful to help you get a running start, though you can familiarize yourself with the elements within the context of the game.

The CD-ROM technology allows for more than just the fancy movies and sounds. Ringworld is enormous, and the game's play area reflects this, with many virtual environments to explore. There's even room for such diversions as a ballooning simulator that you can learn to master. There are also arcade action sequences, such as a ride through Ringworld's transport system. In the time I had to look over the game, I could barely scratch the surface of its features, and it seems like trying to track down the answers could keep a gamer busy for months as you explore the planet and avoid being captured.

You can, of course, save your game and quit any time. *Return to Ringworld* lets you save up to eight games at once, though with the variety of scenes available, I wish it could have been more, especially since some of the sequences—like the balloon simulator—are worth more than one visit.

Overall, *Return to Ringworld* uses the strengths of CD-ROM to create a game that's mentally challenging and fun to play. It offers a great combination of movie and game. Playing it is the closest thing to a real visit to Ringworld and will keep you entertained until the first commercial flight to Ringworld becomes available.

Recent & Recommended

•The life of a games referee is not an easy one. You are responsible for whether the time spent by your pack of fellow gamers is exciting or boring. You have to guide them through the pitfalls of your seemingly spontaneous scenario, while at the same time nudging them onward to an explosive (and apparently unexpected) conclusion. It's like being the writer, producer and director of a movie all at once. Plus you have to keep the divergent personalities of your crew in check at the same time. Until now, you've had to go it alone. But *Listen Up, You Primitive Screwheads* (R. Talsorian Games, trade paperback, 112 pages, $10.00) is here to provide you with some relief. Six of the best referees of the cyberpunk world, including writers, players, and the creator of the game itself, have gathered together to share all the secrets behind orchestrating a campaign that will leave your players breathless. Included are tips on believable ways to bring characters together, how to bring in line the disruptive players who want to wander off all over your scenario, building your individual players into a cohesive team, and all the dirty tricks you'll need to create an exhilarating game. If you're a referee who's tired of listening to players whine, this volume will give you all you need to keep them too busy and happily exhausted to complain.

•The *Battletech* universe is one of the oldest and most popular systems in the gaming world. Some players who have been inhabiting that place of astounding weaponry for years may be ready for a step up to the next level. *Battletech Technical Manual* (FASA Corporation, trade paperback, 84 pages, $12.00) is just what is needed for those who think they have mastered all the intricacies of the game. The pages of this advanced supplement are filled with information on rules and equipment necessary for seasoned players to add new depth and intensity to their games. Serious players will appreciate the detailed descriptions of advanced weapon systems, as well as tips on how to build extended campaigns far beyond those they have been using. Additional techniques are included to allow players to work more challenging double-blind games, in which neither player is able to "see" the other's forces until they enter the opponents' visual range. A minimum of three players is required for this advanced mode, but the additional difficulty and skill required is worth the effort. The publisher dedicates this volume to the memory of Jack Kirby, "creator of heroes, villains, and universes," who "gave us the dreams and inspiration to illustrate them." With this volume, the FASA staff has managed to create a worthy tribute. □

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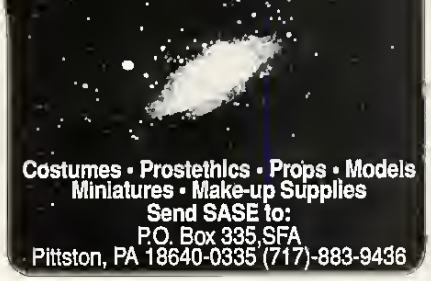
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BOOKS

Continued from page 16

abuse: of children, of the environment, of women. His heart is in the right place, perhaps, but one cannot help hoping that, eventually, he might tackle abuse issues with the subtlety of Susan Palwick's *Flying in Place*. His constant use of these themes becomes termagant, as he attempts to strip-mine the same emotional quarries where he earlier found success. Sadness infuses *Memory and Dream*, but the book does not wallow in this emotion or in self-pity. There is grief, unrequited love, and a faerie's longing for "a red crow": for blood to fly through her veins and give her a soul, let her dream.

The lackluster title is based on the abstract, a theory of art discussed late in the book: Art exists in two forms, first as dream, later as memory. Everything in between is just a journey. Both de Lint's conception of this novel and the journey he takes us along are genuine and powerful; after reading it, it does indeed, like a true work of art, linger in memory, turning itself over and over to display now a new face, unglimpsed while reading. The book resolves itself in the span of its last few pages, like the sudden reversals of a Jonathan Carroll novel, into a too-pat happy ending. But the characters have sufficiently earned some happiness, even if it comes mostly from a Hollywood ever-after conclusion. And readers too have earned this respite from his recent hack-work. The glamour and wonder of his earliest novels—*Moonheart*, *The Riddle of the Wren*, and *Mulengro*—which earned him his faithful audience, has matured into a book of sophisticated and human concern.

Lawrence Schimel

***Red Dust**, by Paul J. McAuley, Morrow AvoNova, hardcover, 392 pages, $22.00.*

Every few years since the publication of William Gibson's *Neuromancer*, someone feels a compulsion akin to moral duty to proclaim that *this* time, honest, no fooling, cyberpunk is finally dead. These people are missing the point, in nearly the same sense as those who pronounced the death of the New Wave movement of the '60s. Nothing dies.

Science fiction just did what it always does, took what it could use from a definable shift of perception or technique, incorporated those elements into itself, and emerged, not transformed, but enhanced. Cyberpunk's gift was not technique or even its much-imitated dystopian setting but rather its central conceit—the concept of "information space" serving as both mirror of the real world and metaphor for transcendence. It's a powerful tool, and McAuley makes good use of it in *Red Dust*, a book that is clearly not cyberpunk but builds on what has gone before.

Red Dust is set on Mars almost a thousand years in the future. The United States is a his-

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torical footnote, marginalized long ago by the Han (Chinese). Mars itself has undergone separate waves of colonization, first by the Yankees, then by Tibetans who replaced the failing Yankee colony and oversaw the terraforming of the planet. The Tibetans in turn were overwhelmed by a final wave of Han immigrants when Mars was finally made livable.

Temporarily livable, as it turns out. There was never enough water released during the terraforming project to reach equilibrium, and every year the tide of red dust is slowly rising. Mars is dying. Worse, it's being murdered. Under pressure from "conchie" missionaries of Earth's Consensus, Mars' government has brutally suppressed the Sky Roaders, those who believed the Martians should complete the terraforming of Mars and then push on to the stars. Conchie drones actively sabotage the ecosystem. Earth, fighting an extended war with the anarchist cultures of the asteroid belt, has its own reasons for wanting a dead Mars; what's less clear is why the "Emperor" of Mars and the Ten Thousand Years apparently want the same thing.

Wei Lee is a contract agronomist working for the Bitter Waters *danwei*, a type of capitalist collective that, except for a few scattered cities, serves as the basic unit of settlement across Mars. Lee is also a great-grandson of one of the Ten Thousand Years, a ruling elite made nearly immortal through computer and nanotechnology acquired by treaty with the Consensus. Wei Lee has fled the capital city to try to free himself from the domination of his great-grandfather and to buy himself time while he searches the data nets, trying to learn the fate of his parents, who disappeared during the purges of the Great Reassessment. Wei Lee knows his escape is merely temporary—he owes his great-grandfather a life debt for his upbringing and knows that one day the old man will collect.

That day comes even sooner than Wei Lee expected. An anarchist agent named Miriam Makepeace Mbele manages—barely—to penetrate Mars' planetary defenses and is captured near the Bitter Waters *danwei*. She's a genetically engineered mercenary, carrying a load of special "totipotent" nanotech viruses within her body. These have the ability to confer extraordinary physical and mental powers on anyone infected with them and, according to the agent of his great-grandfather who contacts Wei Lee, it will be his duty to help her escape so that his great-grandfather can acquire them.

It's not that simple, of course. Wei Lee is framed for the murder of the anarchist's guards, and his and the anarchist's deaths are neatly and dispassionately arranged. Wei Lee and the badly injured Miriam barely escape on a genetically enhanced warhorse into the Martian wastes. Within a short time, Wei Lee is infected with the totipotent viruses himself, and his real journey begins.

It's a journey of both distance and perception, discovery and transcendence, and as on any hero's journey, there are helpers and guides along the way: Miriam Makepeace Mbele, first in body and later as a personality aspect roaming free in information space. Redd, the archetypal Yankee cowboy. Chen Yao, a little girl who carries the partially encoded personality of a long-dead anarchist agent like the aspect of a god. Vette, the tattooed harpooner (shades of a female Queequeg) of the dwindling Free Yankees. First, however, and before all, there is the King of Cats.

Describing the plot turns of *Red Dust* from Wei Lee's escape until the climax atop Mars' highest volcano would take far more space than I have here. Suffice it to say that we learn the fate of Wei Lee's parents and the true nature of the Consensus, the Emperor, the Ten Thousand Years, and of Wei Lee himself. We learn who wants the planet and people of Mars to die and why. And why it is so important to the future of *all* humanity that they be stopped.

Nitpicks? A few. McAuley sometimes forces words into unfamiliar roles, and some major players are left obscure. The book builds slowly, but that's because McAuley has a great deal of foundation to lay down to support the story he's telling. It's not a simple story, and not always an easy one to read, but well worth the effort. I missed McAuley's earlier book, *Eternal Light*. I intend to correct that.

Richard Parks

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TRANSCENDENTALISTS

Continued from page 63

stained and tattered, still hung from the front portico. Inside there was a faint stale smell. The big black kettle was overturned. Cooking utensils lay rusting beside it. The burlap sacks of food stock had been torn open and emptied. All that was lacking to complete this dismal picture were spider webs hanging from the rafters; the archinada, fortunately, are not found in the extreme southern latitudes.

I noticed a dull metallic gleam.

The pudding bucket was sitting near the far end of the dining table. It looked as polished as it had the night before. Beside it was a bowl, filled with pudding; beyond it was a dark shape I took to be one of the burlap sacks. Moving closer, I saw the shape was in fact a human skeleton. It was sitting slumped in a chair, skull resting face-down on the edge of the table. It wore a moth-eaten purple gown, and its bony fingers were extended toward the bowl of pudding as if it meant me to share with it its final meal.

"Stavan..." it whispered to me.

I turned and fled.

LITTLE WOULD BE ACCOMplished by detailing either my fruitless search for the colonists or the uneventful return voyage aboard the *Honesty*, except to assure the reader that I daily grew more certain of my intellectual faculties and less enamored with the colonists' existential paradigms. I now doubt that I am a variable—or a constant, for that matter.

But the evidence of my senses remains. I saw twenty people vanish, and a village age two decades overnight (I did not return there after my first gruesome encounter). Two explanations readily offer themselves: the first, that the colonists perpetrated an elaborate hoax upon me while I was intoxicated; the second, that there were no colonists and my memories of them and their village were the product of a fertile fungus or overripe fruit that I inadvertently consumed.

There is, of course, a third explanation: that all happened as I remember it. I loathe to mention, let alone defend this alternative, not because I am troubled by the notion that we are scribblings on a universal blackboard, but because I dread the conclusion that would then be forced upon us. For if in uttering the words that completed the Overfunction, I brought destruction upon the colonists, would that not suggest that the solving of all the problems in each scientific domain would prove equally catastrophic?

Lord Wombley is near to unlocking the secrets of the atom. Orestel has almost solved the mystery of the mind. Let us hope our coming discoveries bring creation not annihilation, progress not decline, life not death. □

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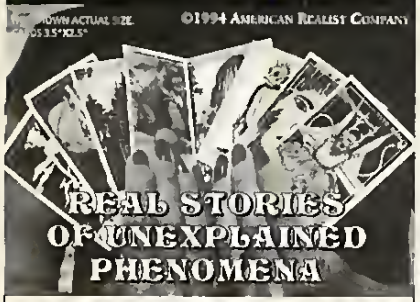
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SCIENCE

Continued from page 32

through a wormhole be like?

BENFORD: Like the New York subway, only worse. [laughter] No homeless, apparently very few graffiti, but very narrow, very quick. Surprisingly, getting from here to Alpha Centauri might involve scooting down a wormhole that might merely be the length of a football field. They are shortcuts, things with an enormous energy density, and therefore have an exorbitant price.

CRAMER: Passage through a spherical wormhole would be like Thomas Hobbes' description of human existence: nasty, brutish, and short.

BENFORD: Well, that's what it's like to play football too.

FORWARD: Actually, some of the wormholes we've been talking about, in order to construct them, you have to make two spheres, where the insides are connected by distances that are on the order of an atom, and therefore, it would be more like opening a door and walking through. And, if you design the thing properly so that the exotic matter that forms the wormhole is safely ensconced away inside vacuum pipes, it will be just like opening a door and walking through it. There's one other place to find wormholes. There are very strange things going on in the small. An electron has many of the properties of a wormhole, mathematically, and it has some queer things about it that indicate that we really don't know what an electron is. Conceivably we might be able to make a wormhole out of something like an electron, and send messages through it. We ought to look at ongoing particle physics experiments. There are many experiments where particles are being made, and conceivably some of those particles could be disappearing. Normally, the physicists who take this data say, well, we didn't collect everything from that particular collision, so we're going to throw this chunk of data out. We ought to take a look at the cases where things are missing, and see if there wasn't an event that indicated that a particle disappeared from our space through a microscopic wormhole. There's an experiment that's going on now, in which we have telescopes using a CCD [charge-coupled device] camera looking at lots and lots of stars all the time, and looking for an occasion when one of them temporarily gets a little brighter for a few days. The brightening indicates that some heavy object moved in front of the star, and the gravitational field of that object caused it to focus the light toward the Earth, making it brighter. These are called MACHOs for MAssive Compact Halo Objects. One of the things suggested at the workshop was that if wormholes existed, half of them should have negative mass, and they might be big enough to cause a de-lensing, or decrease, in intensity.

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SF AGE: Shall we call it a NACHO—a negative compact halo object? [laughter]

FORWARD: Or a large astronomical negative mass object. And so, one of the things we're going to do is to suggest that they take the data from the MACHO search and look for NACHOs.

BENFORD: So a NACHO is a chip off the old block?

CRAMER: Why do these things have negative mass? Because if you have a wormhole, and mass passes through it, it trails its gravitational field lines, and so on the way in, it increases the mass of the wormhole mouth, and on the way out, it decreases the mass of the wormhole mouth. This is dynamically unstable, because the more mass that passes through the positive gravitational end, the more mass it will attract and suck through, and therefore the more negative the other end will get. And so it seems to be a fairly good bet (with very low odds admittedly) that one could look for objects with sizable negative mass as a way of detecting cosmological wormholes. The spherical wormhole, the so-called Morris-Thorne wormholes that started the whole ball rolling, are not the only game in town. There are other ways of constructing wormholes, particularly if you have negative mass cosmic string available as a construction material. It appears that in the early universe, if there were little loops of negative mass cosmic string around (and there's no reason why they should not have been there), then at the end of the inflationary period, there might be stable wormholes surrounded by a loop of cosmic string. These might connect one region of space with another. This is quite nifty, from the point of view of science fiction, since it provides a natural "stargate" for going from one place to another, or even from one universe to another.

SF AGE: What's a cosmic string?

CRAMER: A cosmic string is a disruption in space that has a linear form. This has to do with the fact that space can have different quantum phases, rather like domains in a permanent magnet. The joints between these pulse domains can make walls, or straight lines, even points. A cosmic string is a straight disruption, a linear pulse boundary space. They might have been created in the big bang, and in certain cases might persist to this day. Positive mass cosmic strings are probably gone, because they vibrate and radiate their mass away in gravitational radiation. But negative mass cosmic strings don't have that option, because they can't radiate negative gravity waves away, and so would still be around. They might break up into smaller pieces, but that just means that the wormhole mouths that we have to deal with are smaller than the size of a galaxy, which is probably what we want.

BENFORD: Faster than light is about the entire paradigm of exceeding human horizons, and that's why it appeals to us.

CRAMER: I think that faster than light

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travel in science fiction is like sex, it mostly happens off-stage, because there isn't really a good physical theory of how you do it, and yet you need it for plot mechanisms and, therefore, you wave your hands and say something about warp drives or extra dimensions or some other mechanism and just do it. I think the science fiction novel that does faster than light travel in a really elegant physical way has yet to be written, and maybe one of these days one of the people at this table will write something like that.

SF AGE: How have you handled FTL in your own work?

BENFORD: My primary engagement was *Timescape*. But the first novel I ever wrote, *The Stars in Shroud*, had a galactic empire in which FTL was only possible by the conversion of a ship into tachyonic states. The necessary technology was running down, and that was the background of the novel.

SF AGE: How does the scientific community view this looking at the possibility of faster than light travel?

CRAMER: I think that the scientific community has come a long way in the last five or ten years, in that there are papers that are published about faster than light communication by wormholes, and papers about time travel by wormholes, and so forth, and a sizable fraction of the community is taking this seriously. That certainly wasn't the case ten years ago. So there's been what you might describe as a paradigm shift, and I believe that it's very useful. The original idea of introducing the three-dimensional wormhole, by Kip Thorne and his student Mike Morris, was a way of getting at certain problems that are intrinsic to quantum gravity by a sort of an end-run about the problem of actually formulating quantum gravity, using the FTL and the time travel possibilities to guess what the rules of quantum gravity might be. I believe that some of these rules are actually emerging, and we are learning things that wouldn't have been learned if discussion of what are essentially science-fictional things, time machines and wormholes, had not made it into the serious literature of science.

FORWARD: Another reason why the scientific community has been more willing to look at these things is that as we scientists look further into both wormholes and the faster than light phenomenon, we all know within our hearts that there is going to be something that prevents us from going faster than light, or having wormholes, or going back in time. But all the present theories, especially Einstein's gravity theory, allow time machines or faster than light phenomenon. This means that there is something new to be found in physics that—in some way or another—will probably restrain us from faster than light travel or wormholes. This new physics has yet to be found, and the only way you can find it is to keep pushing at the boundaries of our present knowledge.

BENFORD: Hear, hear! □

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CONTRIBUTORS

JOHN BRUNNER PUBLISHED HIS first novel, *Galactic Storm*, in 1951 at the age of seventeen. Since that time he has produced many important SF novels, including *The Sheep Look Up*, *The Shockwave Rider* and *The Jagged Orbit*. His finest work is *Stand on Zanzibar*, which won him both the Hugo and British Science Fiction awards, as well as the Prix Apollo. He has also published five books of poetry. Brunner lives in the United Kingdom.

Since his last appearance in these pages, **Richard Parks** has made sales to *Dragon*, the anthology *100 Vicious Little Vampires*, and our new sister publication *Realms of Fantasy*. Several new stories are in the works. **Lawrence Schimel** has sold to over forty anthologies, with his most recent short stories appearing in *Black Thorn, Rose Red*, (Roc).

Connie Hirsch recently sold "Year's Turning" to *100 Vicious Little Vampires*. **D. Douglas Fratz** was the editor and publisher of *Quantum*, a magazine of SF criticism that was a five-time Hugo nominee. He is currently the assistant editor of *Science Fiction Eye*. His book reviews have appeared in *Fantasy Review* and the *Washington Post*. By day, he is an environmental scientist in Washington, D.C.

Harlan Ellison recently won both a Locus Award and a Stoker from the Horror Writers of America for his novella "Mephisto in Onyx." He is also a Hugo Award nominee, and by the time you read these words, he may very well have taken home that trophy as well. **Paul Di Filippo** recently sold his short story "Skin Twister" to an Italian anthology published by the Casa Editrice Nord.

Chuck Rothman published his first short story in 1982, and since then his fiction has appeared in *Aboriginal*, *Galaxy*, *F&SF*, *Tomorrow*, and our new sister magazine, *Realms of Fantasy*, with additional stories forthcoming in *Pulphouse* and the anthology *The Ultimate Superhero*. His novel *Staroamer's Fate* appeared in 1986.

Elizabeth Moon's latest novel *Sporting Chance* (Baen), is just out, which explains why the prince from her previous novel *Hunting Party* was acting like an idiot. She is most known for her *Deed of Paksennarion* novel sequence. A native Texan, Moon lives with her horse, husband, and child, though not necessarily in that order.



Mike Resnick



Nicholas A. DiChario

David Ira Cleary has recently been published in *Universe 3*, *Tomorrow*, and *The Colorado Science Fiction Anthology*. He attended Colorado University at Boulder, with majors in mathematics and English, which he feels helped inspire his story this issue. He will be starting graduate school this fall to major in English. **David Brin** tells us that his story this issue was inspired by his two young children, for he feels that it is incumbent on all of us to keep the events therein from coming true. His collection *Otherness* (Bantam) is just out, containing some stories never before seen in the U.S. He will shortly begin work on a novel about our country's drug wars.



David Ira Cleary



Clark Perry

Mike Resnick is a two-time Hugo winner and nine-time Hugo nominee. He is the author of more than thirty-five SF novels, half a dozen collections, and one hundred stories, plus is the editor of twenty anthologies. His most recent novels are *Inferno*, *Prophet*, and *Lucifer Jones*. His next novel to see print will be *A Miracle of Rare Design*. **Nicholas A. DiChario** burst upon the field like a supernova with his story "The Winterberry," which was immediately nominated for a Hugo and a World Fantasy Award and was instrumental in his being nominated for the John Campbell Award for Best New Writer. Since then, he has sold more than twenty stories, half a dozen of them in collaboration with co-author Resnick. His next major piece to appear will be in the Anthony/Gilliam anthology *Tales of the Great Turtle*.

Resa Nelson will be the subject of an author profile in a future issue of the review magazine *Tangents*.

Clark Perry has appeared in the anthology *Young Blood* (Zebra), and will soon appear in *Ghosts*, the Horror Writers Association anthology guest-edited by Peter Straub. He has been a dishwasher, necrologist, soda jerk and film critic, and recently co-wrote a travel guide to northwest Florida, where he makes his home. □

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